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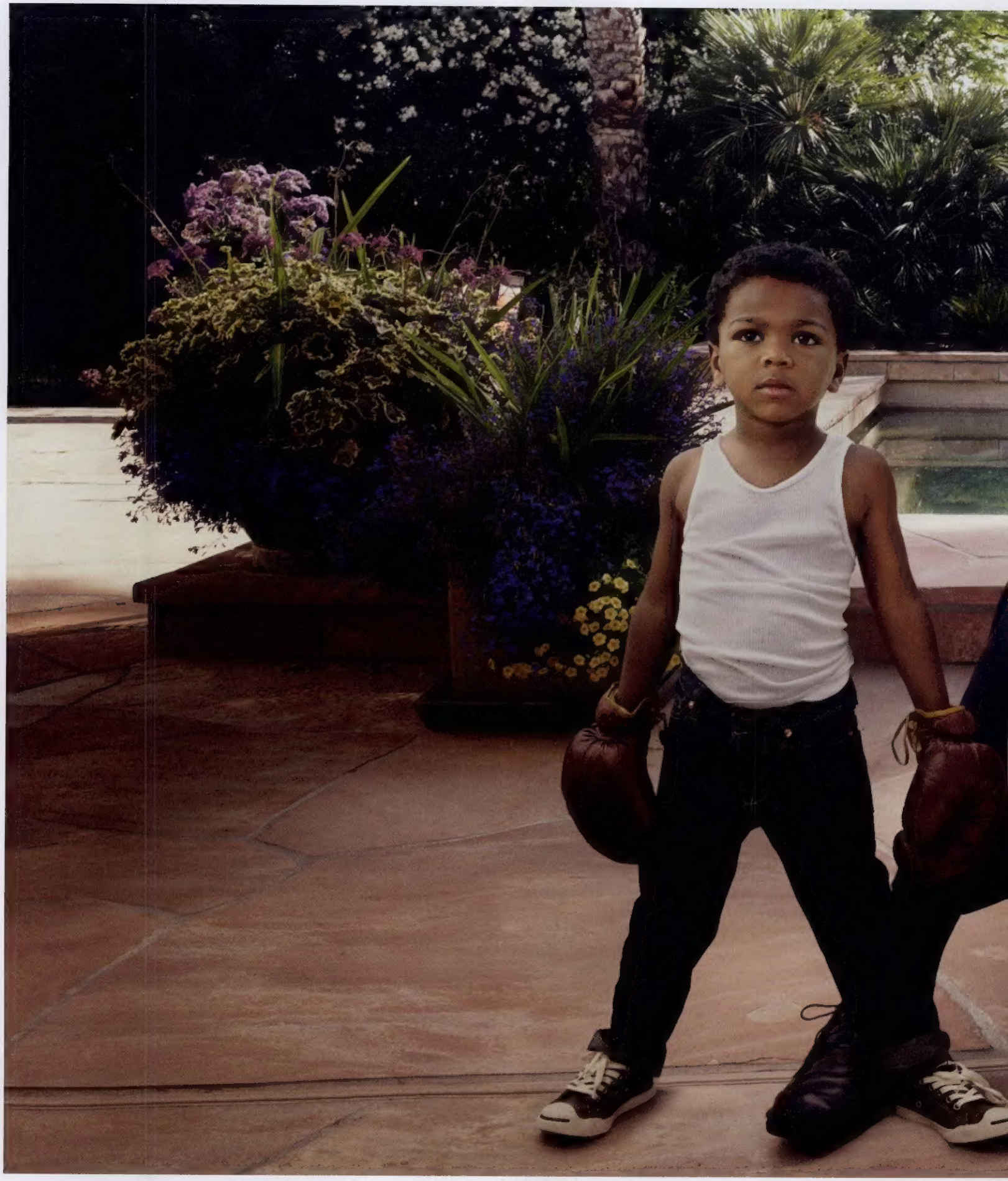

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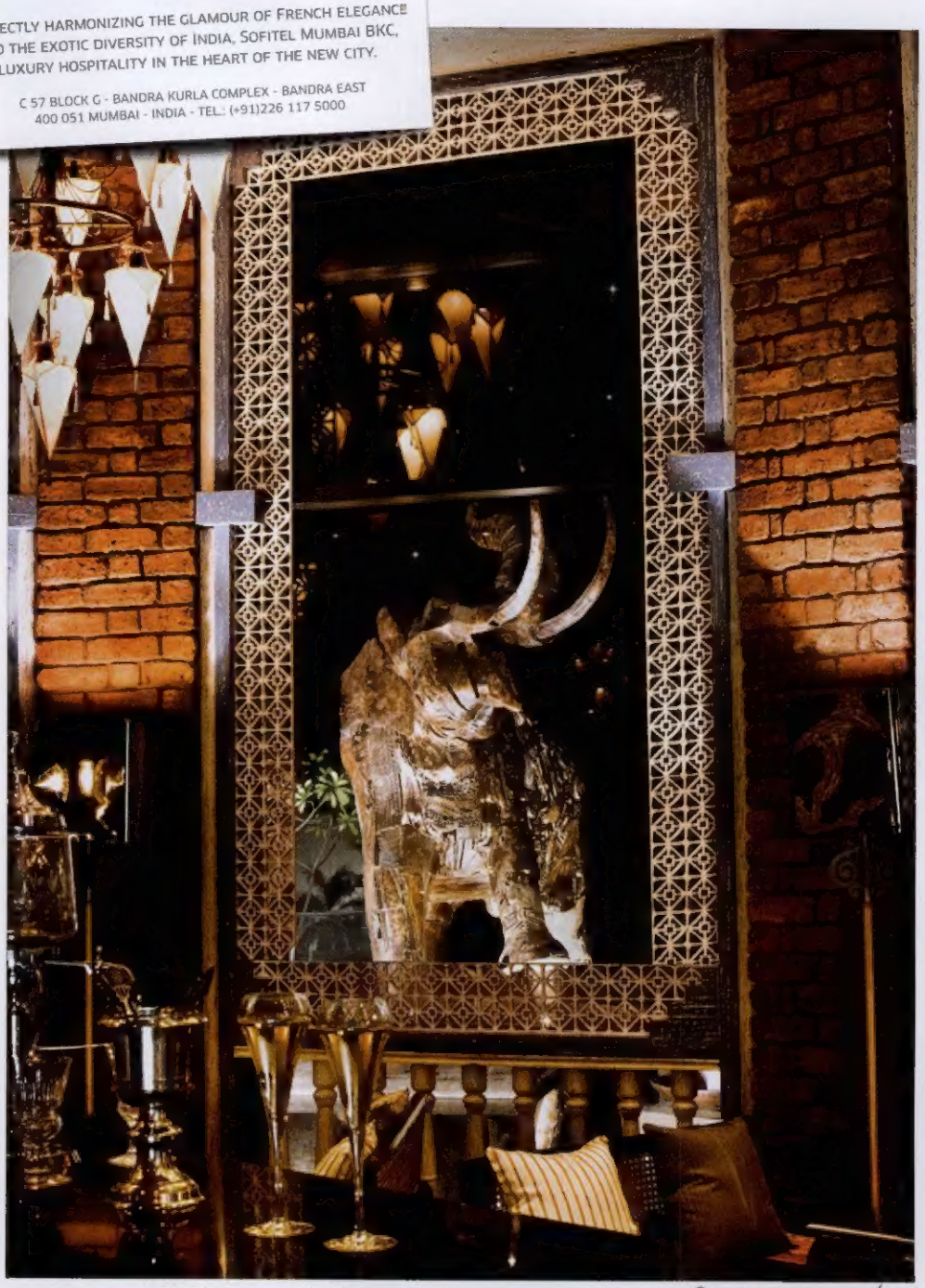

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COVER PHOTOGRAPH **IAN WINSTANLEY**

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LETTERS

DO THINK TWICE

Re: Non cogito, ergo sum (Intelligence, May/June)

Ian Leslie is largely correct in saying that spontaneity is the key to successful performance in sport. But there is a corollary – if, for example, a tennis player or golfer is playing spontaneously but still making errors, he and his coach need to think analytically in order to discover what is going wrong. Analysis has its place too.

JULIAN DARE, OXFORD

Years of practice or study, or the great accumulation of knowledge in a field, can produce what is called genius when combined with talent. However, intuitive decisions based on ignorance result in racism, bigotry, religious fundamentalism, purple prose, awful poetry, self-published books and walking in endless circles when lost in a foggy forest.

SCRAPIUS

There is an old Chinese saying: think carefully before acting. I believe it. Good intuitions come after plenty of hard thinking.

F BAI

It would appear that the solution would be to know when to think and when not to think. But wouldn't this process involve thinking?

LEYRTJ

Not as wild as all that

Re: A Walk on the Wild Side (Places, May/June)

Robert Macfarlane's guide must be surprised that I am around to write this letter after 30 years of going to Belfast with an English accent and a pair of walking boots, and then travelling through Northern Ireland on foot, sometimes even hitchhiking.

Macfarlane certainly did justice to the Mountains of Mourne – beautiful and haunting – but the idea that there's a threat of violence left a sour taste in the mouth by reinforcing stereotypes and misleading readers as to the reality of Northern Ireland. There's more danger in some parts of London than in the villages of County Down.

SEAMUS TREANOR, BARTON UNDER NEEDWOOD, ENGLAND

Please don't walk on the Mourne Wall unless you are prepared to repair it. Robert Macfarlane is right – it is a functional structure and that function is not to act as a path.

SIMON

What's wrong with "coloured"?

Re: Why mention skin colour at all? (Intelligence, May/June)

I'm sorry that Alan Hansen got into trouble for using the term "coloured". After all, the great organisation of the civil rights movement was the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People – which of course is still going strong.

For many of us, the changes in racial terminology are confusing. The writer seems to have his heart in the right place, but the current terminology works fine, surely. White, black, mixed-race – what's the issue here?

SID SMITH

The question is about the idea of purity. I'm black, but I have white and Native-American ancestors. Does that make me mixed-race? No. Just how mixed is mixed?

CHUMBO LEX

Two more non-Americans

Re: At the Cinema (Culture, May/June)

Tom Shone's column on the rise of the British superhero discounted the fact that not only is Ryan Gosling not interested in blockbuster action films, but he's also not American. He's from Canada. The article also mentions "Shame", which starred Michael Fassbender, an Irishman. When you add these two to the list of British imports, it makes the lack of made-in-America top actors even sadder.

ADAM JANUSZ

Teen dressing: a cri de coeur

Re: Applied Fashion (Style, May/June)

My parents are super-conservative, and it doesn't help that I live in a third-world country. My mum has always been my stylist and she usually seems to be five years behind. I'm going to college soon and I'm still not allowed to dress for myself. To top it all off I'm really tall and my body is a weird shape (long legs and arms, short torso, massive feet). I fear my horrible fashion sense and abnormal body may never allow me to be confident.

AFRICAN GIANT

Thank you, Rebecca Willis, for explaining why it's so dark in stores like Hollister. I have an online store for tweens, and have been flummoxed why the bricks-and-mortar teen stores are so intimidating. I thought they

were emulating night clubs. Now it makes perfect sense – it's to keep the parents out.
KRISTEN, LOS ANGELES

Add a pinch of spice
Re: Stove Notes
(Intelligence, March/April)
I generally enjoy reading Simon Hopkinson's column, but in an era when the English adore their curry, the Dutch their satay, the Americans their Korean tacos, could he choose some more exciting recipes? A magazine claiming to represent "Intelligent Life" could do a bit better than having a recipe for mashed potato.
SUMAIRA CHOWDHURY, MOZAMBIQUE

Coming round to Facebook
Re: Like? (Features, May/June)
Although I was originally a Facebook-hater, I have now learnt to embrace it. We may be voluntarily sharing personal information and being targeted with advertising, but the benefits of staying in touch with people far outweigh the negatives. I would rather read my Facebook newsfeed than watch television. At least the adverts on Facebook are quiet, unlike those on TV.
JUHLI SELBY

CORRECTION
In "A velvet fist" (May/June), a profile of the campaigner for nonviolent change Srdja Popovic, we said that the gunman who killed the Serbian prime minister Zoran Djindjic in 2003 had never been caught. In fact, 12 people were convicted of the killing in 2007, including the gunman. Our apologies.

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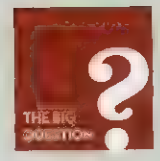


READERS CHOOSE THE BEST OF 20,000 INSTRUMENTS

In the fifth of our Big Questions we asked, which is the best musical instrument? Richard Morrison, the chief music critic at the *Times*, introduced the debate, and laid out its complexities. Not only does the question go beyond music – touching on "the essence of identity, aspiration, expression, history and politics" – but there are also just so many instruments to choose from. We've been making them for over 67,000 years, and the next edition of the "New Grove Dictionary of Musical Instruments" will have 20,000 entries. Undeterred, we asked five writers to pen a fanfare to their favourites.

The composer and broadcaster Michael Berkeley went for the piano. It may not be very portable, he wrote, but it outplays the competition with its impressive solo repertoire and its extraordinary range. Anything from birdsong to burbling water is within reach of its ivories. Laura Barton looked for range too, but found it on the guitar, which can evoke "looping giddiness" as well as "stalking and slavering and snarling" – and all with just six strings. The distinctive swell of the Hammond organ – "a roadie's nightmare...and a listener's dream" – tugged at Richard Williams's heartstrings, while Jasper Rees chose "the matchless thrill" of mastering the French horn, which he started when he was ten and wrote a book about many years later. Finally, Edward Carr searched inside himself, and argued for the instrument we all carry around with us – the voice, "a personal stamp capable of endless variety".

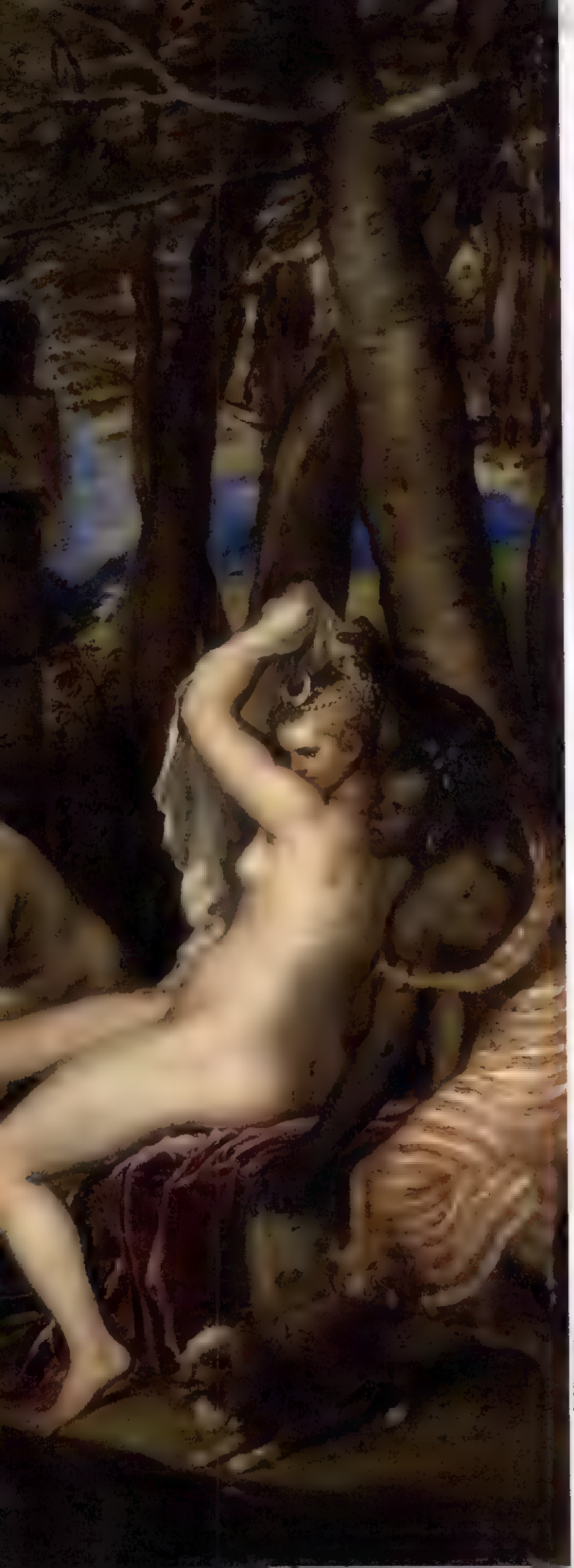
More than 1,000 readers had voted in our online poll as this issue went to press. The piano was proving most resonant, scoring 38%. The guitar and the voice were playing a duet, sharing second place with 17% each, followed by the French horn (9%). The Hammond organ wasn't quite in tune with readers, scoring just 2%.

One voter, Steve Meikle, found it hard to pick just one instrument and so plumped for an entire symphony orchestra, while others singled out orchestral workhorses like the cello, violin, flute and clarinet. The oboe was popular, with one voter sticking up for its "moody and peculiar" duck-like sound. The drums, said another, were "the foundation of musical expression". The trumpet attracted some with its "sound of triumph and heroism". But there were also votes for less familiar instruments, including the flugelhorn, the bandoneón, the shakuhachi and the bayan.

Some readers chose instruments for their similarity to the sound of the human voice. As Edward Carr pointed out, there is music inside us all and, since singing is so good for us, we should all just find our own voice. But even though the piano is the popular favourite, perhaps it doesn't matter what instrument you choose so long as the music plays on. ~ GEORGIA GRIMOND

To vote go to moreintelligentlife.com/page/which-is-the-best-musical-instrument. The next Big Question is on page 62

THIS SEASON



THE NATIONAL GALLERY

EXHIBITIONS

Titian – the festival

The National Gallery in London is having a Titian-fest and the Royal Opera House is joining in. So are three youngish British artists, seven choreographers, three composers, 14 poets and a fleet of dancers.

When he died, in 1576, Titian was the most famous artist in the world. He was a master of colour, and while his proportions might look over-generous (thunderous thighs, bulging bottoms), his paintings are Renaissance masterpieces. "Diana and Actaeon" (*left*), "The Death of Actaeon" and "Diana and Callisto" are three of the best and they lie at the heart of this project. Part of a series of mythological paintings based on Ovid's "Metamorphoses", they are full of intense drama. Surrounded by bosomy nymphs, Diana and Actaeon exchange a thorny glance before Actaeon is clawed to death by his own hounds.

In response, Chris Ofili, Conrad Shawcross and Mark Wallinger are creating stage sets and costumes for three new ballets to be performed at Covent Garden. "The artists we have selected are very different," says Minna Moore-Ede, curator of the show. "I wanted at least one painter, and they all needed to think big." She commissioned them two years ago and has been working on the show for five. "We still have an awful lot to do," she says with a nervous giggle. "Nothing is finished." The details have been kept under wraps; and not just for effect. "We will only know when the curtain goes up."

There is a poetry project, too. Carol Ann Duffy, Simon Armitage, Seamus Heaney et al, chosen by a panel chaired by A.S. Byatt, have produced new work inspired by the paintings. The poems, capped at 25 lines, vary in tone and texture – like the original text. A screening room will show the poets narrating their work, along with snippets from the ballets. Original music for these has been commissioned from three leading composers, Mark-Anthony Turnage, Jonathan Dove and Nico Muhly; the choreographers include Wayne McGregor, who is not afraid to be peculiar. Throw a bit of Titian into the mix, and who knows what to expect. ~ OLIVIA WEINBERG

Metamorphosis: Titian 2012 National Gallery, London, July 11th to Sept 23rd

EXHIBITIONS AT A GLANCE

Van Gogh to Kandinsky: Symbolist Landscape in Europe 1880-1910 (National Gallery of Scotland, July 14th to Oct 14th). Europe's first show dedicated to Symbolist landscape, and worth the wait. Among the big names, look out for two underdogs: Akseli Gallen-Kallela and Albert Edelfelt.

Santiago Calatrava: The Quest For Movement (Hermitage, St Petersburg, June 27th to Sept 30th). The first retrospective of a contemporary architect at the Hermitage and not a bad start. Calatrava's buildings sing like his name. Spiky UFOs or bulbous pods, they soar into the sky as if they are alive.

Edvard Munch: The Modern Eye (Tate Modern, London, June 28th to Oct 14th). After winning the highest price for a work of art at auction ("The Scream", $119.9m), Munch arrives in a show proving he's relevant as well as recognisable.

Prom: Photographs by Mary Ellen Mark (Philadelphia Museum of Art, July 1st to Oct 28th). In 2006-09, Mark photographed 13 high-school proms using her 20x24-inch Polaroid Land camera – one of only five in the world. The results are extraordinary, large-format prints, packed with detail.

Another London (Tate Britain, London, 27th July to Sept 16th). Red buses, bowler hats, pearly kings, pigeons, pubs and punks: 180 classic 20th-century photographs, from some big names: Cartier-Bresson, Irving Penn, Eve Arnold. Not as boring as its title.

Worlds within Worlds: Imperial Paintings from India and Iran (Smithsonian, Washington, July 28th to Sept 17th). From 1556 to 1657, the great Mughal patron-emperors formed workshops to foster India's leading artists. Here is a selection of their lavish manuscripts, folios and paintings. ~ OW

ROCK AT A GLANCE

Leonard Cohen (European tour Aug 12th to Oct 7th, N. American tour Oct 31st to Dec 20th). His world tour of 2008-10 was a career high, charming large crowds with high emotion and dry humour. Can he do it again at 77? A delicious new album, "Old Ideas", says he can.

Meltdown (Southbank, London, Aug 1st-12th). The artsiest of rock festivals is curated by Antony from the Johnsons, who brings on his personal left-field pantheon: Diamanda Galas, Marc Almond, Laurie Anderson, plus the astute curator Hal Willner, and most strikingly, Liz Fraser, the beguiling voice of the Cocteau Twins, back on stage after a 14-year break.

Lady Gaga (European tour, Aug 14th to Oct 6th). Madonna's natural heir, or the Alice Cooper of the 21st century? Either way, headlines will be made.

Lawrence Arabia (album, July 16th). Crazy name, gifted guy: second album from a New Zealand singer who writes beautiful tunes and quirky lyrics.

Tony Bennett (European tour, June 24th to Aug 1st). Expert crooner who is now the oldest swinger in town, at 85. Leonard Cohen, eat your hat out. - TDL

ROCK

Ask not for whom the games toll

When was it decreed that where there is sport, there must also be music? Who knows, but now Madonna pops up in mid-Superbowl, indie anthems go with highlights montages, and the Olympics bring a smorgasbord of gigs. Hyde Park in London has shows for every generation: Duran Duran, Snow Patrol, Paolo Nutini and Stereophonics (July 27th) for the middle-aged, representing Britain's four nations, if not the majesty of its music; Dizzee Rascal and Katy B (July 26th), to prise the teens from their sofas; and Tom Jones (July 28th, free), rejuvenated by a stirring new album. The best bet could be Blur, who have a great warm-up act in the Specials (Aug 12th). But the most intriguing musical event comes at the unlikely hour of 8am on July 27th, when Martin Creed, both a Turner-winning artist and a rock singer, presents "All the Bells", and anyone with a bell – church, door, sleigh, even bicycle – is urged to ring it. It promises to be bizarre, chaotic and just possibly magical. - TIM DE LISLE

***All the Bells** across Britain, July 27th; allthebells.com*

FESTIVAL

McBurney dances in the dark in Avignon

The Avignon Theatre Festival is often said to be like Edinburgh, only with sun and better food. Not according to Simon McBurney (*pictured*), the actor, director and founder of Complicite theatre company. "The origins of Edinburgh are linked to a pomp and ceremony – the Tattoo in the Castle," he says. "Whereas in Avignon the schism of the Catholic church took place and it was a centre of the Resistance during the war. So it is a highly symbolic act to create something there."

McBurney is re-creating his adaptation of Mikhail Bulgakov's subversive novel "The Master and Margarita", seen this spring at the Barbican. He expects a sophisticated reception. "In English we call people who go to the theatre the 'audience', the people who listen," he notes. "In France, they call them the 'spectateurs'. Visual literacy there is astonishingly high, much higher than in Britain."

He also helped shape Avignon's entire programme as this year's associate artist. "Most international festivals rely on supermarket shopping: 'I'll have half a pound of Robert Wilson and a kilo of whatever's trendy.' The Avignon Festival is built out of an extended conversation with an artist. Each one is very individualised." And in contrast to Edinburgh, it has the balmy Provençal climate. "Shows start at 10pm, you bring blankets for when it gets cold or windy, you're sitting under the stars and there's a wonderful atmosphere. Last year one piece began at four in the morning and people were dancing in the dark as the sun came up." - SHEILA JOHNSTON

***Avignon Festival** July 7th-28th*

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THEATRE AT A GLANCE

Richard III/Twelfth Night (Globe, London, in rep July 14th to Oct 14th). London won't be short of chaps this summer. As well as Propeller's excellent all-male Shakespeare double bill at Hampstead, the boys-only Original Practices returns to its old home at the Globe. Front of stage is the transcendent Mark Rylance, reprising both the hunchback impostor-king, and his tottering, tricksily female Olivia.

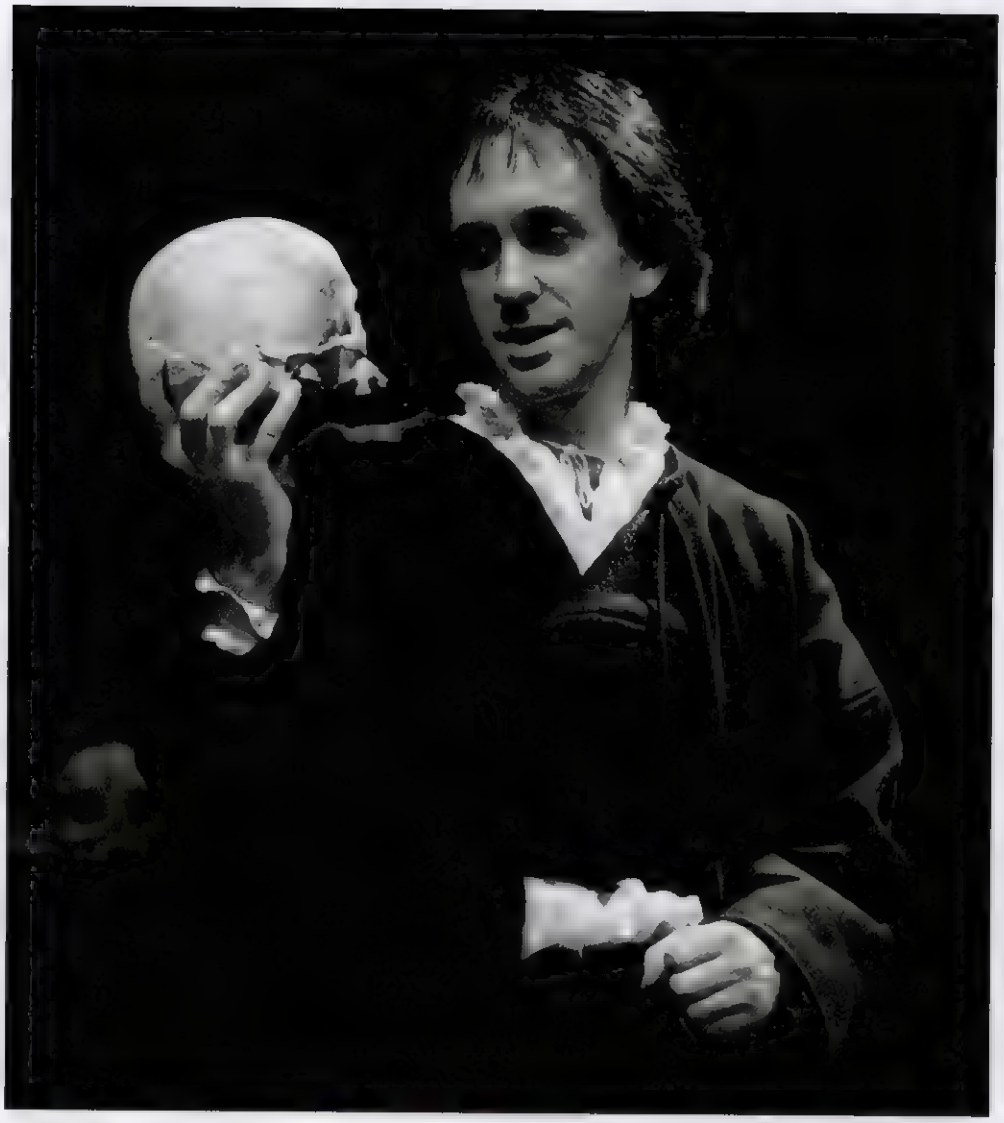
Edinburgh Festival Fringe (Aug 3rd to 27th). A one-man play about Hitler, a one-woman play about Marilyn Monroe, sixth-formers taking on Pinter: there's much that's familiar at the world's biggest arts festival. But also, not: where else could you see a "tragi-comical musical" partly performed by a Barbie doll?

Uncle Vanya (Lincoln Centre, New York, July 19th to 28th). Sydney Theatre Co makes a return visit to America. Cate Blanchett, a luminous Yelena, and her co-star Hugo Weaving (Astrov) both won awards with this production in Washington last year.

Surprises/Absurd Person Singular (Minerva, Chichester, Aug 8th to Sept 8th). Alan Ayckbourn doesn't get out much; even before a debilitating stroke in 2006 he rarely worked outside Scarborough. So this double bill – one new play, one old, both directed by their author – at Chichester is a doubly big event: his swansong, perhaps?

Jumpy (Duke of York's, London, Aug 16th to Nov 3rd). A West End transfer for April de Angelis's spry comedy about a left-leaning mother bashing up against the wall of wh'everness that is a teenage daughter. Tamsin Greig is the mum flip-flopping in a net of liberal guilt.

Hysteria (Theatre Royal, Bath, July 26th to Aug 18th). Terry Johnson, master of post-modern farce, revives his own stinging comedy about consciousness, dreams, and – like all the best jokes – death. Antony Sher plays Freud, dealing with cancer and an appropriately surreal visit from Salvador Dali. - ISABEL LLOYD



ARENA PAL

THEATRE

From Hamlet to the gold watch

Jonathan Pryce (*pictured*), who returns to the Almeida to play Shakespeare's King Lear in August, is the latest in a long line of British actors to have the role bestowed on them like a gold watch, marking a lifetime's distinguished service and the prospect of imminent retirement. It is both an honour and a death sentence; and the lesson to be learnt from Ian McKellen and other recent Lears is not to leave it too late. Old as he is, the king must have something to lose.

At 65 Pryce has got his timing right. He looks ravaged, but still has a quarrel with the world. No one, as yet, is likely to write his work off as magisterial. He remains the most eye-catching actor of his age group, both for what he does and for what he is. When I first saw him, in Brenton and Hare's "Brassneck" at the Nottingham Playhouse in 1973, he personified danger; he had the psychotic's sparkling eye and every gesture carried the threat of violence – which fully erupted in his nightmare portrait of Gethin, the class-war stand-up comic in Trevor Griffiths' "Comedians" (1975, also Nottingham). Then came the 1980 "Hamlet" at the Royal Court (*above*), in which Pryce amazingly doubled as the Prince and the Ghost of his father, taking the play to a new level of anguish.

Since then he has had a prolific film career, ranging from the hapless lead in Terry Gilliam's "Brazil" to the megalomaniac media mogul in the Bond film "Tomorrow Never Dies", while making carefully chosen returns to the theatre, where he excels equally as power figures and as the wretched of the earth. The defining image of Pryce is of a man seared by some atrocious memory, doing all he can to behave with the utmost gentleness, while still harbouring his own store of volcanic rage. To sum up these qualities in two words: King Lear. - IRVING WARDLE

King Lear Almeida, London, Aug 31st to Nov 3rd

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* EXACT AND EXULTANT

FILM AT A GLANCE

360 (Aug 10th). Peter Morgan, writer of "The Queen", and Fernando Mereilles, director of "City of God", team up for a 21st-century "La Ronde". A chain of brief encounters stretching from Vienna to London to Phoenix, it captures the texture of a globalised world, but lacks heart: everyone is moving, and no one feels at home. Anthony Hopkins brings much-needed twinkle to a cast that includes Jude Law and Rachel Weisz.

Seeking a Friend for the End of the World (July 13th). Ready for Armageddon: the RomCom? Steve Carell and Keira Knightley go on a road trip in the last days before an asteroid strike.

The Dark Knight Rises (July 20th). Yes, it's the third in a series of superhero blockbusters, but "The Dark Knight" was received so rapturously that "The Dark Knight Rises" is hotly awaited. At any rate, Christopher Nolan and Christian Bale have promised that this is it.

Brave (Aug 17th) Pixar follows the lucrative but little-loved "Cars 2" with something completely different. "Brave" is its first fairy tale, with its first female lead and its first all-British voice cast. Still, after the huge success of "The Hunger Games", the adventures of a rebellious girl with a bow and arrow couldn't be more timely.

The Bourne Legacy (Aug 13th). After "Avengers Assemble" and the latest "Mission: Impossible", Jeremy Renner proceeds with his campaign to muscle in on every single action franchise, here deputising for Matt Damon as a colleague of Jason Bourne's.

Undefeated (Aug 10th). Winner of this year's Oscar for Best Documentary for its searching analysis of what it takes to turn a failing high-school American-football team into a winning one.

Shadow Dancer (Aug 24th). James Marsh, who directed "Man On Wire" and "Project Nim", proves just as gifted at drama as he is at documentaries. Grim enough to make "Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy" feel like a trip to the circus, "Shadow Dancer" stars the formidable Andrea Riseborough as an IRA sympathiser forced to betray her family by Clive Owen's MI5 agent. NICHOLAS BARBER

FILM

Pecs, drugs and Soderbergh

Steven Soderbergh's new film is a cautionary tale that won't prompt much caution. Its hero, Channing Tatum (*left*), is a male stripper who invites a 19-year-old drop-out, Alex Pettyfer, to join his Florida dance troupe. Pettyfer is ecstatic, but there's a high price to be paid for all the sex, drugs and cash suddenly being thrust his way. Stripping is bad for the soul – or so the script would have us believe. The snag is that "Magic Mike" is so affable and funny that it's likely to have audiences racing to their nearest all-male revue. The choreography is sensational; the flirtation between Tatum and Pettyfer's sister is endearing; and Matthew McConaughey (*far left*), continuing an almost unbroken streak of shirtless roles, steals the show as the troupe's rootin' tootin' manager. By the time the moralising starts, it's too late: magic has already been worked. It's ironic, because Soderbergh is hardly known for the warmth of his work. More and more, his films come across as remote experiments in editing technique. But not this time. With "Magic Mike", his efforts to be cold and aloof are a delightful failure. NB

Magic Mike British release July 11th

CLASSICAL

Yuja Wang goes for gold

If the Olympics had a keyboard category, there's no question who would win it. When Evgeny Kissin heard Yuja Wang's blistering performance at Verbier two years ago, his admiring comment was that even her compatriot Lang Lang could eat his heart out, because in terms of technique there wasn't anything this phenomenal young woman couldn't do—seemingly without effort. From a cultivated Muslim home, Wang (*pictured*) began her piano studies at Beijing conservatory, where she stayed until she won a competition in Calgary at 14. She then enrolled as a top-flight student at the Curtis in Philadelphia: now, at 25, she has an American college-girl manner, and bridles when pigeonholed as a Chinese pianist.

Deputising in turn for those keyboard greats Radu Lupu, Murray Perahia, Kissin and Daniel Barenboim, she exploded onto the international circuit; with her first two CDs confirming her extraordinary talent; her latest, a collection of encores, is a flawless extension of the photogenic charm which has made her a marketing executive's dream. But as her recent recital at London's Queen Elizabeth Hall revealed, she doesn't yet have the musical wisdom required for Beethoven: prestidigitation is only the beginning of great pianism. At Verbier on Aug 3rd she will dazzle with Scriabine, Rachmaninov and Ravel; for those who can't be there, her YouTube performances make a fine second-best. - MICHAEL CHURCH

Verbier Festival July 20th to Aug 5th. verbierfestival.com

CLASSICAL AT A GLANCE

BBC Proms (Royal Albert Hall, London, from July 13th). There's an emphasis on Britishness and celebrity in this Olympic/Jubilee year, with the meat spread thin. But there are still treats: Barenboim and his West-Eastern Divan Orchestra playing all nine Beethoven symphonies; the superstar tenor Jonas Kaufmann in Berlioz's "The Trojans" (Prom 11); Mark Elder conducting leading soloists, two great orchestras and choirs in Elgar's "The Apostles" (37); a full John Cage centenary celebration (47); and I Fagiolini delivering Renaissance rarities with their sparkling blend of song and physical comedy (53).

La Fenice (Savonlinna Festival, July 6th). A lake-girt castle creates an aura of magic; Kimmo Hakola's new work tells a tragi-comic tale inspired by the destruction by fire of Venice's opera house in 1996.

Das Labyrinth (Salzburg Festival, Aug 3rd). Mozart's actor-librettist Emanuel Schikaneder provided the text for Peter Winter's sequel to "Die Zauberflöte", which was a huge hit in its day. This production will let people see what happened next to the young lovers. - MC

TALKS

A grand set of days out

If live literature in Britain has a bastion, it is surely the Gothic fastness of Dartington Hall in Devon (*right*). Now in its 21st year, the Dartington Hall Ways With Words Festival has spawned offshoots from Suffolk to Cumbria, but none can quite match the original's blend of grand surroundings and an intimate, irreverent atmosphere. This summer the medieval walls provide a fitting backdrop for Hilary Mantel's erudite take on Thomas Cromwell's England, and an unlikely one for a meeting of that most poised of interviewers, Joan Bakewell, and the queen of camp, Julian Clary. Also celebrating its 21st birthday is Jung Chang's "Wild Swans": the author adds quiet gravitas to an impressive list of political writers, including the ever-combative Tariq Ali (assessing Barack Obama) and the ever-controversial Orlando Figes. Admirers of John McCarthy's measured, eloquent radio broadcasts for BBC Radio 4 can hear him recount his travels through Israel and Palestine, while three distinguished Michaels fly different flags with self-deprecating wit: Holroyd on biography, Palin on travel writing, and Frayn on theatre and fiction. - ANTHONY GARDNER

Dartington Hall Ways With Words Festival July 6th-16th. wayswithwords.co.uk

TALKS AT A GLANCE

Tom Stoppard (British Library, London, July 6th). Marking his 75th birthday by looking back on his radio plays with actors who have appeared in them, including John Hurt, plus John Tydeman, former head of BBC radio drama.

Alice LaPlante (Tosca Café, San Francisco, June 26th). LaPlante caused a stir by winning last year's Wellcome Trust prize for medical writing with her first novel, "Turn of Mind", narrated by an Alzheimer's sufferer.

T.S. Eliot Festival (Little Gidding, Cambridgeshire, July 7th-8th). The poets Paul Muldoon, Daljit Nagra and Bernard O'Donoghue read and discuss Eliot's "Little Gidding" in front of the church that inspired it. Richard Harries, the former Bishop of Oxford, debates whether Eliot's faith made him a better poet. - AG

FELIX BRODDE

INTELLIGENCE

"The only people who could have done it" Watson steel in Bolton, where Anish Kapo "Orbit" was creat

DESIGN

Boutique engineering

Behind every new stadium or giant artwork is a team of engineers doing things that could not have been done a decade ago. Samantha Weinberg watches them at work

A GOOGLEWHACK IS a combination of two words that, when entered into Google, returns a single hit. Ten years ago, the British comedian Dave Gorman travelled the world on the trail of googlewhacks such as "coelacanth sharpener" and "rarebit nutters". He could have tried "boutique engineering".

At first glance the two words do not sit easily together: "boutique" conjures up images of softly lit spaces filled with hand-picked items, "engineering" suggests the large-scale, the technical, and a lot of hard hats. But, had he been searching now, Gorman would have found prime examples of boutique engineering in his back yard – at a Lancashire steelworks, and in the new Olympic park at Stratford in London.

Watson Steel is tucked away down an unremarkable lane in Bolton. On a typical spring day in the lee of the Pennines, rain is blowing in horizontal shards across the half-empty car park. A metal door opens into a vast shed, one of five, each three storeys high and the length of a football pitch. At one end, there is what looks like a medieval instrument devised to torture people – a milling machine for boring holes into thick metal. Large pieces of steel – girders, plates, joints and tubes – fill the inner space, like pieces of a jigsaw waiting to be put together. Standing at various junctures are men wearing dark overalls and hoods, plastic visors pulled down, gauntlets on their hands. And everywhere there is the smell of burning metal, radiating out from flashpoints of blinding white light, where steel is being welded to steel, more or less as it has been since the 1850s, when Henry Bessemer of nearby Sheffield invented the modern steelmaking process that kick-started the industrial revolution.

As you head into the next vast shed, one man stands out among the cutters and welders. He's still wearing a boiler suit and headphones to muffle the din, but instead of cutting or torching steel, his industrial-sized fingers are tapping lightly into a laptop, while beside him, a red laser beam shoots out from what looks like an old-fashioned camera perched on a tripod, and lands on a large piece of steel. He looks up from the screen and calls out instructions to his colleague, who adjusts the steel plate by a millimetre. Then he nods and watches as a hole's position is marked at the exact spot pinpointed by the laser.

DAVID KIDSON

> A few weeks later, 175 miles south, a crowd has gathered at the Olympic Park to witness the unveiling of the Orbit, the tall, twisted Anish Kapoor sculpture commissioned to act as some sort of talisman for the London 2012 games. Reaction to the piece has been mixed: some critics have hailed it as London's answer to the Eiffel Tower, while others have railed against its colour (red), size (114.5 metres high), cost (£22.7m, of which £19.6m came from the ArcelorMittal group, mainly in the form of donated steel) and deformed aesthetic. Even the mayor of London, Boris Johnson, who persuaded Lakshmi Mittal to jump on board the project in a cloakroom in Davos only three years ago, has called it a "vast Fallopian ampersand".

Whatever other feelings it may engender, up close the Orbit provokes a sense of wonder. It is like an outsized version of the childhood game of Construct-o-Straws, except in this case, almost every straw is a different length, every join and joint has a unique specification. Even on a playroom scale, the ingenuity required to piece something like that together – let alone make it safe enough for an estimated 5,000 people to crawl all over each day – is awe-inspiring. And although Kapoor has been getting the giant's share of the attention, with his co-designer, the engineer Cecil Balmond of Ove Arup taking second billing, their vision only became reality because of a man on a laptop in Bolton.

On the walls of Watson Steel's office are photographs of the structures they've worked on: landmark buildings such as the Bullring shopping centre in Birmingham, bridges like the Millennium in Gateshead, airports in Hong Kong, Osaka, Paris (Charles de Gaulle) and London (Terminal 5), sports grounds including Bolton's Reebok Stadium, much of the Olympic Park (including the acclaimed Velodrome and aquatics centre, and the eco-minded main stadium), and the Emirates, Arsenal's home in north London.

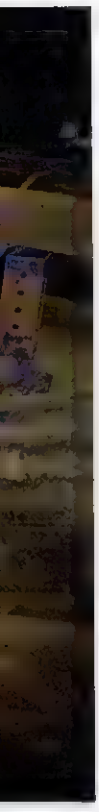
"The Emirates was our first job using the 3D-modelling system," says Jarrod Hulme, who followed his father and brother into Watson Steel, starting as an apprentice, and who is now the engineer responsible for issuing the software data for each job. "It had very complicated geometry, which would have been almost impossible to work out in the old way. Using this model, we were able to do away with spirit levels and most of the paper and drawings, and translate it directly to the shop floor. I have to say, though I'm a Man United supporter, it's the best stadium I've ever been to."

He talks about The Model with reverence, as some sort of magic catalyst that has stretched the boundaries of steelwork, engineering and, by extension, architecture and design. It involves a software package originally developed by the Finnish firm Tekla in 1961 – before the dawn of the computer age. Over 40 years, it was refined and augmented by a triumvirate comprising Tekla, the lens manufacturer Leica and Watson Steel, to the point where it was ready to be used nine years ago. An architect – or in the case of the Orbit, an artist – designs something, and an engineer does the sums to ensure it works, before sending the specifications to a steel contractor such as Watson, where they are plugged into the Tekla model. This produces the information needed to fabricate each piece of steel, and the position of each bolt and joint in three-dimensional form. In the fabrication shop, the 3D model is on a laptop which communicates with satellites set into the roof. The satellites relay the information to the theodolite – the thing perched on the tripod – which then calculates its relative position to any piece of steel, and shoots out a red laser to mark the exact point at which a cut, hole or weld must be set. In this way, the whole structure – whether a building, a bridge or a sculpture – can be envisaged, in laser beams, before a single piece of steel is fashioned.

We've got big heavy bruisers in there who've become technology enthusiasts

It's a far cry from the back-of-the-envelope calculations of the past, or even the painstaking sums and intricate blueprint drawings of a decade ago. "It's incredibly accurate. We generally work to a tolerance of +/– 2mm on each of the axes, which means we can send components to site confident that they will fit together," says Steven Day, the managing director of Watson Steel. No two segments of the Orbit are alike. "Out of over 15,000 bolts, we only had one misalignment – and that was due to a software glitch."

Matt Collier was one of four Watson erectors who spent a year in east London fitting the tubes and



A model of accuracy
Today's sophisticated steel structures rely on 3D software

bolts of the Orbit as they arrived on long loaders from Bolton. "I came here on the first day and there was nothing. I got the drawings and thought, 'Oh my God, how on earth are we going to build that?' But once we started to put it together, we started to understand it, to get a feeling for the orientation of each bit. And you know what...it all fits together perfectly. It's a credit to the fabricators up in Bolton." The whole sculpture – all 1,740 tonnes and 114.5 metres of it – has ended up within 12mm of where it was supposed to be.

Watson is not the only steel firm to be using the 3D-modelling technology; eight years after work began on the Emirates Stadium, it is now widely used in the industry. But Watson is probably the best, certainly at the more original, boutique-type projects. As Bill Price, a director of WSP engineers who has worked with Watson on several projects, explains: "You can look at a building and say 'That's got Watson's stamp on it.' Every signature architect would probably consult them over an interesting building. They're the only people who could have done the Orbit."

Up in Bolton, Jarrod Hulme describes how the steelworkers were trained to use the model. "We've got some big heavy bruisers in there who've become technology enthusiasts. They take their laptops home and sleep with them under their pillows. And they have become a part of it. We take their comments and criticisms and feed them back into the system."

David Worthington is a sculptor whose work involves bold, otherworldly stone shapes, often supported by gangly steel legs. Although not on the Orbit scale, they are heavy enough to require cranes, reinforced floors and detailed engineering input to ensure that three tonnes of polished granite doesn't topple onto the toes of unfortunate passers-by. He's currently working with WSP on a new series of pieces: smooth stone creatures each perched on a troika of spiky spider's legs. Once the design is done, it may be sent up to Watson to be modelled, adapted and edited, before the lasers define the dimensions of each set of legs in one of the great sheds in Bolton. "It has changed the nature of what I do," says Worthington. "Now I can concentrate on the theoretical side and leave the often complicated practicalities to people who know how to solve them. As an artist, it's liberating."

Worthington's sculptures will join the Orbit, the Shard and Zaha Hadid's Glasgow Museum of Transport in Watson Steel's engineering boutique window, while other projects, big and small, queue up in the lanes of Bolton to be massaged into the 3D model. In one corner of northern England, you can see business booming, which, in the current climate, may well be another googlewhack. ■

Tom Standage

A Game, a Gadget and an App

At last, a satisfying version of Monopoly. Plus a personal trainer on your wrist

GAME MONOPOLY DEAL

Playing Monopoly is tedious. Hours of crawling around the board, amassing houses and cash, in anticipation of a dramatic showdown that may never come – how many games are paused, never to be resumed? Monopoly Deal, by contrast, takes the best elements of Monopoly and turns them into a pacey card game. There's no rolling dice and passing Go, no making change, no board and no jail. Instead there are sudden reversals, surprise moves and plenty of scope for deception. Special cards let you steal and swap properties, demand outlandish rents or (best of all) "Just say no" to neutralise an opponent's move, but the whole thing still feels familiar. Crucially, each game lasts only 10-15 minutes, so you end up playing several rounds and exacting revenge on those who bankrupted you last time. On a rainy weekend this game will have everyone ditching their electronic gizmos for one more round – it's that good. Clever design allows children and adults to play as equals. But be warned: you may be shocked at how devious your children can be.

Monopoly Deal by Hasbro, about £10

GADGET NIKE FUELBAND

The FuelBand feels as if it has fallen out of the future. A black, rubbery wristband, it contains motion detectors that track its wearer's activity around the clock. Press its single button and a magical embedded display comes to life, showing the time, steps taken, calories burned and Nike's proprietary "Fuel" score. The idea is that you set a target score for each day and then try to beat it, turning exercise into a game. To raise the stakes, the FuelBand syncs with a smartphone app and a website, so you can see how you compare against other users. Unlike Nike's previous glorified pedometers, it's not just aimed at sporty types. By turning the daily trudge to the station into a fitness game, it will appeal to a far wider audience of people who worry that they ought to be doing more exercise – and who will find themselves getting off the train a stop early to boost their score. Very clever, Nike.

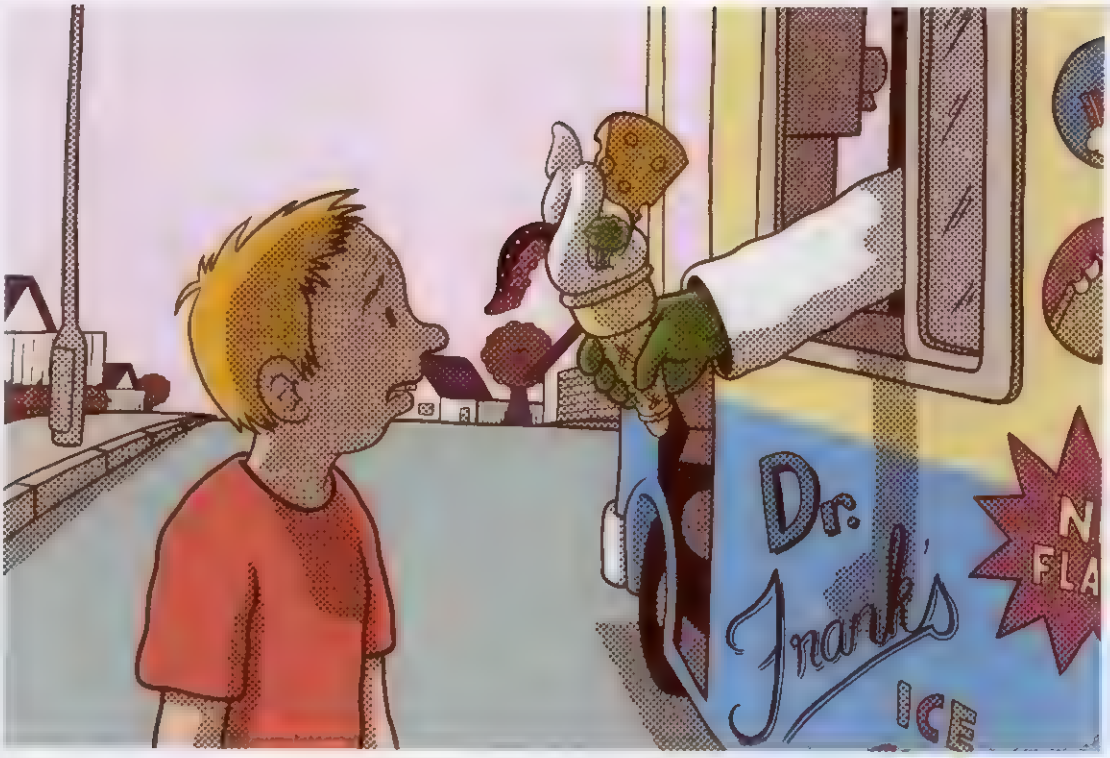
Nike FuelBand £139

APP FRANKENSTEIN

Is it a book, a game or an elaborate updating of the "choose your own adventure" genre? This retelling by Dave Morris of Mary Shelley's "Frankenstein" combines all three, and more artfully than the title might suggest. Text scrolls up the screen, with the story gently pushed along by your choices and responses, quickly drawing you in. Like the original, the tale is told from several perspectives, though it has been relocated to revolution-era France. The typography and illustrations, presented as if on sliding sheets of old paper, are gorgeous, especially on the pin-sharp display of the latest iPad. As authors, publishers and readers grapple with the possibilities presented by tablet computers, "Frankenstein" is an impressive and entirely new kind of e-book.

Frankenstein (Profile) for iPad and iPhone, £2.99/$4.99

INTELLIGENCE



FOOD

Shock ice

Prosciutto, rosemary, even crab – the latest ice-cream flavours are a long way from vanilla. **Christopher Hirst** puts them to the test

In my 1950s English childhood, a faintly flavoured vanilla, strawberry and chocolate ice-cream brick called a "Neapolitan" was the height of sophistication. Only in New York in the 1970s did I discover ice cream with true and startling flavours. I still recall my first zingy lick of black cherry, and the subtle nuttiness of pistachio, so surprising in an acid-green ice cream. Later, I sampled the spectrum of fruity, nutty, chocolatey and alcoholic flavours in Italian *gelaterias*. Highlights include custardy, Marsala-tinged *zabaione*, *stracciatella* embedded with slender filaments of chocolate, and *zuppa inglese*, the bastard child of English trifle.

Recently, I have tried even more adventurous ice creams: celery flavour in a London café (green, sweet and bland); Heston Blumenthal's mustard ice cream made for Waitrose supermarkets (creamy and rich but diffident in its heat); and a chilly invention from Giorgio Alessio's Scarborough restaurant, Lanterna, that delivered the unmistakable, assertive taste of black pudding – highly palatable, but disconcerting. "I had to make it a few times to know the right quantity to put in," Alessio told me. "You know it's there, but it's not overpowering. Tables tend to share one portion."

Ice-cream makers have always been prone to experiment. In 17th-century Naples, they used a bean newly arrived from the Spanish colony of Peru. The result was the first vanilla ice. Parmesan ice cream was popular in pre-revolutionary France and Regency England. In her book "Harvest of the Cold Months", Elizabeth David noted that early ice creams were flavoured with perfume ingredients, such as ambergris from sperm whales and musk from musk deer. The London-based ice-cream expert Robin Weir recently recreated these oddities using artificial versions of the original ingredients. The results had "a wonderful, flowery smell and fragrance," he told me. "Everyone loved them." For a food symposium, he made perhaps the world's most expensive sorbet, with eight bottles of the stratospherically priced Château d'Yquem: "Absolutely fantastic."

In his book "Ice Creams, Sorbets and Gelati: The Definitive Guide", Weir advocates such unlikely ice-cream flavours as Guinness, goat's cheese and burnt chocolate. The latter has "a sophisticated and complex flavour", Weir says; but the active ingredient is "best made on the barbecue. There are copious quantities of smoke." He admits to some persona non grata among ice-cream flavours. "Fresh pineapple doesn't work. Sweetcorn is possible, but not worth eating. Garlic was not a success."

Morfudd Richards, who sells her creations across Britain from a psychedelic ice-cream van called Lola's on Ice, has further expanded the possibilities. Her book "Lola's Ice Creams and Sundaes" includes recipes for Welsh-rarebit ice cream (including the obligatory Tabasco and Worcestershire sauce), beetroot-cassis sorbet and horseradish ice cream. However, mushrooms were a step too far. "Too earthy for a dessert ice," says Richards. She also tried making an ice cream from seared beef infused with a red-wine reduction, but "the results weren't particularly pleasant".

More adventurous ices come from Humphry Slocombe, an idiosyncratic ice-cream bar in San

ILLUSTRATION **PETE GAMLEN**

Francisco. The name merges two characters in the BBC sitcom "Are You Being Served?", a favourite of the bar's owners, Jake Godby and Sean Vahey. Their "Humphry Slocombe Ice Cream Book" includes salt-and-pepper, pumpkin five-spice and peanut-butter-curry ice cream. But not green pea: "We couldn't quite nail that one down." Their most notorious flavour is foie gras ("we even got death threats"), closely followed by prosciutto. This cured-ham curiosity is "one of our most requested flavours – it's salty, sweet and delicious". Since it requires the maker to sauté the prosciutto, then add the fried meat and rendered fat ("that's where all the flavour is") to the ice-cream mix, this aficionado decided to give it a miss. However, a variety called Rosemary's Baby sounded tempting. Godby and Vahey mention a "devout lady" who "calls like clockwork to see if we have [it]." It was time to dig out my Gaggia ice-cream maker.

Containing chopped rosemary, toasted pine nuts and olive oil, the recipe for Rosemary's Baby seemed to head in the direction of pesto, but without the intractable garlic. It turned out to be distinctive and addictive: rich, resinous and grown-up, with a crunch from the pine nuts. After this, Humphry Slocombe's olive-oil ice cream was disappointing. The complex flavours – sweet, salt and, from the added citrus zest, bitter – plus the overwhelming richness of cream mixed with oil, reminded me of the filling of a white-chocolate truffle. My wife's view? "Mayonnaise."

Roast-red-pepper-and-goat's-cheese ice cream, from Morfudd Richards's book, proved a triumph in both flavour and appearance – a luminescent orange. With a sweet smokiness, it would work well as a starter. Her crab ice cream was more daunting. Aside from the usual milk, cream, egg yolks and sugar, the recipe includes 500ml fish stock, 150g brown crabmeat and 100g white crab-meat. It should produce 900g, or 45 canapés. I halved the quantities, which still made a lot of pale-pink ice cream. It tasted surprisingly good – slightly metallic, clean, sweet and, yes, crabby – but you wouldn't need very much as a fish course.

I had great hopes for Parmesan ice cream. But despite the ancient lineage of this chilly savoury, my rendition proved to be grainy in texture and sickly in taste; a sad fate for a big chunk of Parmigiano Reggiano. "Like eating very cold cheese," commented my wife. My attempt at avocado ice cream produced mixed results – a lovely pale green, but a taste more like banana, possibly due to using under-ripe fruit.

After this losing streak, I was pessimistic about Robin Weir's recipe for ricotta ice cream. How could such a bland and pallid cheese produce anything worth a lick? But the excellent result demonstrated how certain ice creams mysteriously amplify their flavourings. Creamy with a hint of salt, it was akin to a very good vanilla ice, but with a distinct, subtle depth of flavour that was all its own. Along with Rosemary's Baby, ricotta ice cream will become a resident in my deep-freeze. But there are plenty more chilly oddities out there. I've only licked the tip of the iceberg. ■

Tim Atkin

The Wine-List Inspector

Visiting London for the Olympics? These are the champions, my friends

Ask a bunch of people who sniff, swirl and spit for a living to pick their favourite London wine haunt and I suspect 28°-50° would top the list. Since 2010, this "wine workshop & kitchen" behind Fleet Street has established itself as a destination for thinking winos; so much so that a second 28°-50° opens in Marylebone in time for the Olympics.

As the name suggests – 28° and 50° are the latitudes between which the world's grapes are grown – wine is the focus here. Master sommelier Xavier Rousset updates the list on a weekly basis as he discovers new and interesting things. Paul Walsh's French-influenced bistro food is tasty, too, but most people come here for the vino and the atmosphere.

Rousset, who used to work at Raymond Blanc's Le Manoir aux Quat'Saisons, has gone to the opposite extreme here, choosing a minimalist list that fits on a single page. Hallelujah! If the wines are well chosen, 50 bottles are more than enough for anyone. I say bottle, but all of the wines are available in by-the-glass and carafe sizes, too (75ml, 125ml and 250ml). This means that you can – and should – try several different wines while you're here.

The list is French-focused, but Rousset has a cosmopolitan palate, picking wines from Italy, Spain, South Africa, Austria, Germany, Portugal and America. His preference is generally for lighter, more elegant styles with freshness and acidity, rather than ponderous, oak-saturated flavours.

The highlights are the Sherries (also available as a four-wine flight for £21) and the Burgundies, but there isn't a bad wine on the list. Most of them are priced under £40, which is unusual in London, where wine is too often regarded by restaurateurs as a way of fleecing customers.

If you want to drink something really special, there is also a one-page collectors' list, aimed at people who like the best Burgundies, California Cabernets and *cru classé* clarets. These bottles – some of them dating back to the 1980s – are fairly priced and more eclectic than many fine-wine selections. Examples include a mature, savoury 1999 Château Bouscassé from Madiran (£42) and a toasty, almost Sherry-like 1992 Tondonia white Rioja (£45).

The buzz, the decanting and the popping of corks are all part of the pleasure of dining in the basement, but the best seats in the house are at the large 12-person table on the mezzanine. So go mob-handed and make an evening of it.

2850.co.uk; around £80 for two

THE COMPETITION

Hakkasan, an up-market Chinese restaurant, has been rolled out from New York to Abu Dhabi, but the original in Hanway Place still takes some beating. Its wine list contains plenty of swanky bottles for high-rollers, but is appealingly quirky too. Unlike many Michelin-starred selections, Christine Parkinson's is arranged thematically: biodynamic, signature, curious vines, old vines, blends and (for bin ends) the last few. This makes it hard to find, say, a Sancerre in a hurry, but encourages diners to choose unusual things. The sommeliers are helpful and the wines (£7.40-13.80 for a small glass) complement the food brilliantly.

Quo Vadis is still my chosen place to eat and drink in Soho, especially now that Jeremy Lee cooks there. The owners, Sam and Eddie Hart, love wine, and it shows in their list: a short, palate-watering selection of mostly European bottles, 20 of which are available by the glass (£4-9). Burgundy and Bordeaux provide the window-dressing, though there are bargains from both regions, but the real interest lies in the more unusual Spanish, Italian and French country wines.

hakkasan.com; quovadissoho.co.uk

ILLUSTRATION **CHRIS PRICE**

Oliver Morton *The Music of Science*

Too deep for our ears to hear, infrasound could nonetheless have plenty to tell us

UNTRUE AS IT is, there is something wonderful about the notion that you can hear the ocean when you hold a conch to your ear – a synecdoche of shell for sea, a beguiling fantasy that if you listen hard enough you can hear the womb-sound of the world. The systems used to study infrasound are less poetic; the ones I've seen look like little tarmac car parks with sawn-off drainpipes sticking up out of them. But they make the seashell's promise real. They let you hear far-off oceans.

Infrasound is, like sound (and, for that matter, ultrasound), a matter of vibration. The difference is that infrasound vibrations are slower, which makes the pitch of the sound too deep for the human ear to make out – and the distance the sound can travel much longer. Nine-tenths of the energy in a sound wave at a frequency of 1,000HZ (the C above middle C, more or less) is absorbed by the air within seven kilometres. Absorbing that much of the energy in an infrasound signal at 1HZ takes 3,000 kilometres.

Things that make a vast amount of audible noise often make inaudible infrasound, too. The 1883 eruption of Krakatoa, in Indonesia, is reckoned to have been the loudest sound in recorded history, audible a few thousand kilometres away, physically deafening within 20 kilometres or so. Its infrasound, the first measured as such, went round and round the world, picked up by state-of-the-art barometers as tiny fluctuations in air pressure. Other loud things – thunderstorms, quarrying, battles and the like – subsequently turned out to produce infrasound as well.

In the 1930s Hugo Benioff, who, with his Caltech colleague Charles Richter, was revolutionising the study of earthquakes, found that there was infrasound that had no audible counterpart. His microphones picked up regular little atmospheric trills he called "microbaroms". These are now thought to come about when ocean waves headed in different directions interfere with each other, causing a patch of the surface to rise and fall like a loudspeaker. The northern lights turn out to be another inaudible source of ultrasound. So are some winds, like the Chinooks of Canada, and the ghostly "sprites" of ionised plasma that rise up into the high atmosphere above thunderstorms, too faint to see with the naked eye. Speed their infrasound up to audible frequencies and you hear rather sweet oops-y noises, very different from the thunder of the storms below.

After the second world war, and before the age of satellites, infrasound took on a new significance as a way of eavesdropping on nuclear tests. The wreckage which came to earth at Roswell, New Mexico, in 1947 – *fons et origo* of endless UFO speculation – was part of a stratospheric balloon system with which the United States Air Force was listening out for the first Soviet bomb. By the early 1950s labs in Washington, DC, could record American nuclear tests in the Pacific and bike the tapes over to President Eisenhower's White House.

With the advent of satellite monitoring and the 1963 ban on atmospheric nuclear tests, infrasound lost much of its national-security appeal, and thus its funding. But as Michael Hedlin and his colleagues explain in a recent overview of the field, the creation in the past few years of a comprehensive global monitoring system to police the more general Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty has given it a new lease of life. As well as seismometers and systems for monitoring sound underwater (which can also travel extraordinary distances), this international monitoring system will have about 60 infrasound stations, spread on average 2,200km apart all around the world.

Just as satellite technologies once used to spy on enemies are now used to probe the environment, so it may be with these infrasound stations. Infrasound does not spread evenly; it depends on the direction and speed of winds in the stratosphere, 10 to 50km up, and conditions in the thermosphere, higher still. Seasonal changes in the upper atmosphere mean that in the northern hemisphere it is easier to hear infrasound coming from the east in summer, from the west in winter. By picking up on subtler ways in which infrasound is distorted and redirected by the upper atmosphere, it should be possible to use microbaroms and other relatively common sources to put together profiles of the winds at very high altitudes, which are currently hard to measure both from the surface and from space.

Not paying enough attention to the stratosphere has been a problem for many models of the climate. It's possible that a better understanding of its highest winds could help put that right. And there might also be unconsidered discoveries to make. Scientists did a great job turning the satellites and seismometers called for by national security into new ways of seeing the Earth's surface and its depths. Infrasound could do the same for the structure of the atmosphere's invisible, but not inaudible, heights.

The sound of the world as a whole may never rival the sight of the Earth from space as an inspiration; that people attend to its unheard sound, though, should add an extra susurrus of wonder to every seeming silence. ■

ILLUSTRATION **GARY TAXALI**

It might be images of manufacture and technology that spring to mind when thinking about Taiwan, but you would be missing out if you think that is all this remarkable island has to offer.

This green island opens up a veritable treasure trove of breathtaking views, delectable cuisine and diverse cultural heritage. With over 1,200 kilometers of bicycle paths, you can scale the length and breadth of the country on two wheels and regardless of whether you are a cycling pro or a novice; there is something for everyone. With bike tours, rentals, clearly marked routes and trails, it is no surprise that Taiwan's bicycle culture has become a traveler's dream. The Taiwan Cycling Festival in November attracts people from all over the world, all enthusiastically seeking a journey of discovery.

Riders can travel through history in The Old Caoling Tunnel. Built in 1924, it was the longest railway tunnel in Taiwan. Today, it has been preserved to include a bikeway so visitors can pedal through for a unique insight into Taiwan's past. Continue to cycle back in time through the terraced fields, pineapple plants and Madagascar almond trees of the Longtian bikeway.

Discover the majesty of Sun Moon Lake and then travel into the Hualien region to visit the Liyutan (Carp Lake) bikeway. Take in the tranquil surroundings and even rent a paddleboat for a lake tour. From here you can head out to the coastal Fengbin Port in Hualien City, which is home to numerous seaside attractions and resorts.

If it is ocean views that truly inspire you, then the Shimen-Changbin bikeway along the coastal highway is just the ticket; the route contains one scenic wonder after another.

The Ruisui Cherry Blossom bikeway is a beautiful ride which at its best can be seen bursting into bloom. Pedal past the sweet fragrances of pomelo orchards and admire the hot-spring landscapes along the stone-lined Hongye River.

Even the keenest cyclist needs to unwind and Taiwan's music scene is the perfect respite. The Chihshang Music Festival is an autumn celebration of the harvest. Enjoy an outdoor meal and listen to the array of classical music from the various acts. For a more contemporary music experience, find your way to the Tiehua Music Village in Taitung to be entertained by both local and regional bands.

So much of Taiwan is best seen by bike with its abundance of inspiring and picturesque landscapes, hidden cultural gems and fascinating historical legacy.

Get ready to ride away into the experience of a lifetime.

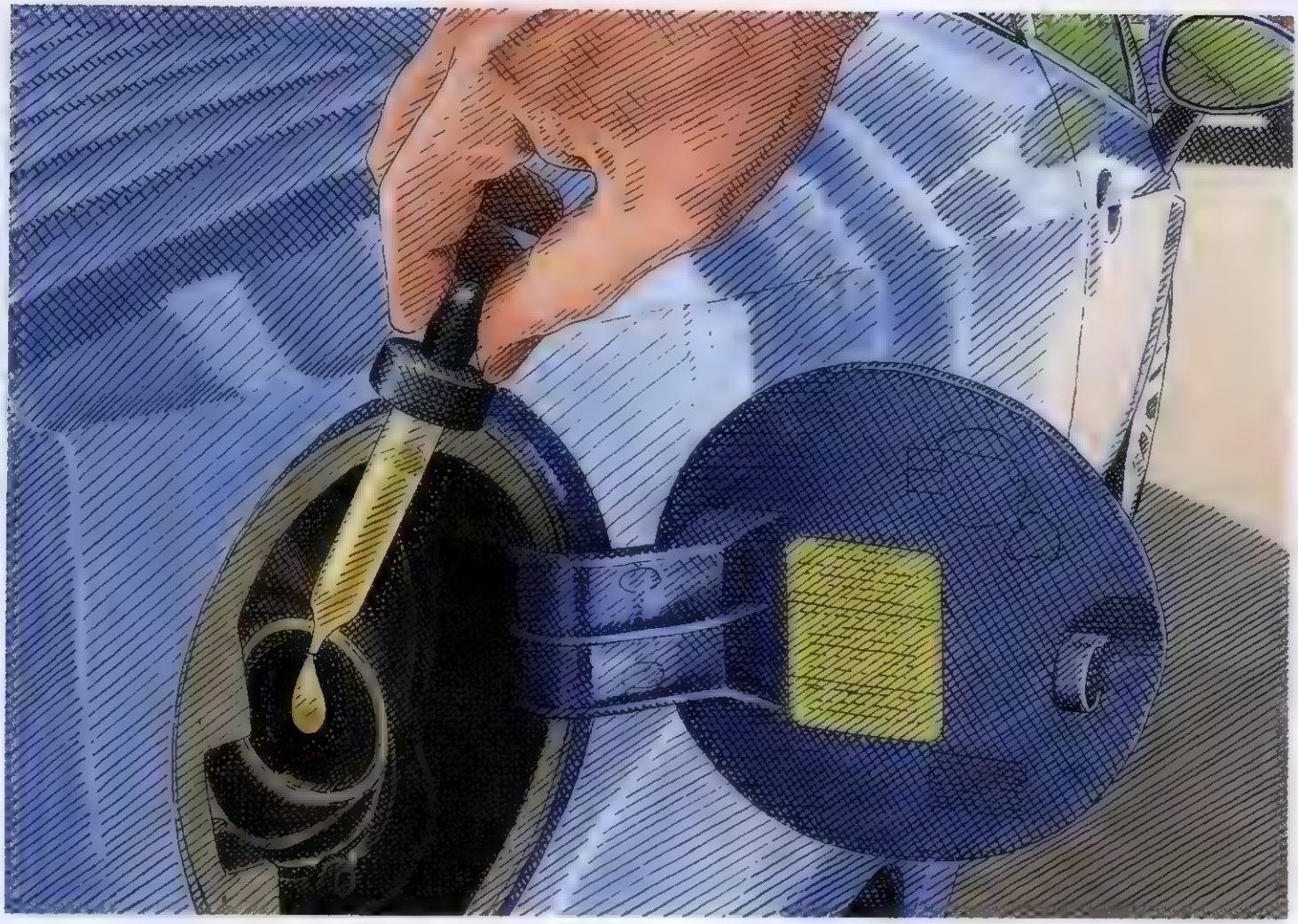
Taiwan Cycling Festival
10 – 18 November 2012

台灣騎跡
2012 TAIWAN CYCLING FESTIVAL

Taiwan
THE HEART OF ASIA

www.taiwan.net.tw

TTB AD



CARS

Let's go a hundred

That's mpg, not mph. **Paul Markillie** sees if it's possible

IT WOULD BE easy, or so I thought. But getting a ton out of this car on public roads was proving really difficult. My chosen 12-mile (19.3km) circular route flowed along country lanes with few other drivers about. Jam sandwiches rarely ventured along here, which is just as well because any police officer would suspect I was drunk by driving in such a manner. But perseverance began to pay off. The digital display on the dashboard was creeping higher: 70, 80 and 90 in places. Then, after several laps, it turned from 99 to 100 and more. But sustaining that performance over more than a mile was impossible.

The reason for this escapade was to address the complaint that crops up whenever motoring is discussed: you can't get anything like the miles per gallon from a car that the manufacturer claims. The reason is that the official figures come from a European test procedure, carried out in laboratory conditions with the car on a rolling road. It is a consistent way of measuring things, but it bears no relation to real life.

What I wanted to discover was not just what it took to match the official consumption of one of the most fuel-efficient cars on the market, but if I could beat it. My target was a real average consumption of 100mpg (2.8 litres per 100km). If that is possible, then the age of everyday ton-up cars cannot be far away.

My chosen car, a Volkswagen Polo BlueMotion, has all the credentials of a fuel miser. It is full of economy features, including a 1.2-litre diesel engine that has three cylinders to burn fuel instead of the usual four, long gear ratios to reduce engine speed and a stop-start system to switch the engine off if you have to wait at junctions or in queues.

The figures for this car are impressive. The European fuel-economy test consists of two parts: an urban cycle in which the car goes through a set procedure of accelerating, cruising, slowing and idling that is supposed to represent driving in town, and an extra-urban cycle to mimic main roads. A combined fuel consumption is calculated from an average of the

ILLUSTRATION **NICK HARDCASTLE**

two, weighted for distance. The Polo BlueMotion has a stated urban figure of 67.3mpg, an extra-urban one of 91.1mpg and a combined 80.7mpg. So wringing a ton out of this car should have been a piece of cake.

It wasn't. Even getting close to those figures required tedious hypermiling techniques, like feathering the throttle to eke out the fuel, avoiding any braking so as not to lose momentum and constantly changing gear to maximise the engine output. One hypermiling trick is to give the accelerator a blip, take your foot off and glide. This pulse-and-glide technique can save a lot of fuel, but your speed might dwindle to walking pace as you crest a hill. It is a horrible way to drive and will send anyone following you bananas.

Even doing all these things I could hold the fuel consumption above 100mpg for only a short spell. But at least it was possible. After several complete laps the best average consumption was a tad under 80mpg. Driving normally in town and country the car returned an average of 58mpg. Compared with many cars that is very good, but it is well short of what the book says.

As a town car, the Polo BlueMotion would be an economical runabout (it qualifies in Britain for zero road tax because of its low CO_2 output). But not for me. I had to rev hard to drive off from junctions at a speed I felt comfortable with, especially in traffic. A regular Polo is nicer to drive, and with a petrol engine instead of a diesel is several thousand pounds cheaper.

Diesel engines are more economical and so emit less carbon dioxide than petrol engines, but they might not be the best choice for frugal motoring – even though about half the cars sold in Britain are now diesels. Diesel has become more expensive than petrol, and diesel-engined cars are more costly to buy and repair than petrol cars. That may mean having to travel more than 15,000 miles a year in a diesel to be any better off during a typical three years of ownership. Moreover, new emission regulations mean modern diesels are not suitable for making lots of short journeys, because their exhaust filters need plenty of long trips to prevent them from clogging up.

Most carmakers now offer a range of both petrol and diesel models with added fuel-saving abilities. Some, like the Polo BlueMotion, use fewer cylinders: Fiat's TwinAir range have two cylinders and Ford's new small Ecoboost engines have three. These engines might be tiny, but they are far from gutless: the one-litre Ecoboost engine in a Ford Focus produces the same amount of power as a four-cylinder two-litre engine did in a 12-year-old Focus. But some engines may deliver that power through wide fuel-saving gear ratios, so only a spell behind the wheel will reveal if that suits your driving style.

Many of these frugal motors come with a saving-the-planet badge attached and that, of course, might mean paying more. BMW uses EfficientDynamics, Vauxhall has ecoFLEX, Mercedes-Benz uses BlueEfficiency and Hyundai badges its economical cars as Blue Drive (in eco marketing, blue is the new green). It pays to compare them with the standard model, which could be cheaper, drives better and still returns a good fuel economy.

But how will you know if the official figures are unreliable? It is becoming easier to find out real-world fuel consumption. Various motoring websites and magazines are compiling such data from users. But fuel-economy metres in cars may not be accurate either. *What Car?* magazine is now using sophisticated measuring gear to establish true mpg figures for all new cars. Some get close to their official figures, but others are way off the mark (*see box, below*).

With so many engineers beavering away on making cars go farther with whatever fuel is in their tanks, we should, within a few years, see the first 100mpg cars. On paper, that is, unless governments come up with a realistic way to measure fuel economy. ■

REAL-WORLD ECONOMY

BMW 320d Sport Beamer with less thirst than some small cars.
*Official: 61.4mpg
Realistic: 54.8mpg
£29,080

Ford Focus 1.6T 150 Ecoboost A hatchback that is nice to drive.
Official: 47.1mpg
Realistic: 35.1mpg
£19,950

Mini Cooper 1.6D Fun for the fashion-conscious.
Official: 74.3mpg
Realistic: 52.5mpg
£16,180

Toyota Prius 1.8 VVT-i T Spirit Older hybrid, but not so green.
Official: 70.6mpg
Realistic: 52.2mpg
£24,910

Volkswagen up! 1.0 black New small car, at home in the city.
Official: 60.1mpg
Realistic: 47.1mpg
£11,180

**Government combined figures/What Car? test results*

FASHION

The speaking cloth

When is a dress more than a dress? When it becomes a message written in silk, cotton and thread. **Veronica Horwell** works out what makes some outfits unforgettable, and selects the best

ONE HUNDRED YEARS ago, there was no such thing as a dress. At least, not as we think of it today: a single, head-to-toe-or-knee piece of fashion frippery. It was only when the avant-garde of the early 1900s got hold of the chemise – for a millennium merely a sweat-absorbing, washable inner layer – that, a bit like Madonna in Jean Paul Gaultier's bra-tops, underwear turned into must-have outerwear.

Since then, the dress has changed and changed again, granting, as does no other garment, an immediate insight into the social structure that produced it: the way we wore the way we were. And though many of the dresses of the past century have been only flimsy defences against the world – exposing the body to criticism as well as the elements – they are still believed to have an immediate transformative effect. Wear a dress, and you shall go to the ball – or down the red carpet, or up the aisle. No old woman is going to reminisce about her best coat; but she's almost obliged to be nostalgic for her old frocks.

Few dresses, historically, were single garments. Post-medievally, women were collaged from multiple parts that added up to a whole. Elizabeth I's splendiferous 1588 Armada portrait "dress" was in fact rigged from more than a dozen components – including skirt, underskirt, undersleeves and winglike oversleeves, gold-embroidered and supplemented with mounted gems – temporarily attached to a bodice. Her wardrobe crew bought thousands of new pins every few months to hold the whole together, not very securely – pins must have pinged on the floor whenever she moved. It was meant to be overwhelming when viewed from afar – across a cathedral or court. As a theatrical triumph, it is unsurpassed because of its discipline: a modern eye still reads it as a "dress" with consistent imagery in Liz's signature black, white and gold.

All the world's my stage
BELOW Elizabeth I's "The Armada Portrait", 1588; a long-distance call to attention

Before the 20th century, what we now see as a simple one-piece dress was usually a disjointed bodice and skirt – such as the black satin gown flaunted in 1883 by Virginie Gautreau, billed by her portraitist John Singer Sargent as "Madame X". Gautreau was a New Orleans belle, the faithless wife to a Parisian banker, and expert in artifice (she used stage cosmetics – then thought whorish – eyebrow pencil and lilac-tinted powder). Singer Sargent persuaded her to pose in the dress, possibly made by the Parisian couturier Charles Worth, or his rival Emile Pingat: whichever, it was a stunner. The silhouette of the early 1880s was narrow, but Gautreau demanded something even narrower, and alarmingly untrimmed. The dress had the fashionable cuirass, or armoured, bodice, held up by a bone armature. Most women added a decent froth of frill over the shoulders; Gautreau pared it back to vestigial straps. It was this that was the shocker when the portrait was displayed in the Paris Salon. There she stood, sans long gloves or mitigating wrap, so provocative – and worse, a strap had slithered off her shoulder. A slut in her shift! Gautreau dented what reputation she had. Singer Sargent decamped from Paris to London. He tautened the strap, but it was too late for both.

That's the risk of the going-for-broke dress – when the reaction doesn't go to plan, it can break the wearer. The best literary, and movie, dress uses this failure as a plot point: Margaret Mitchell knew Yankee embargoes in the civil war had left southern women drably clad, and she had experienced the make-do-and-mend of Depression poverty. This informed her scene in "Gone With the Wind" in which Scarlett O'Hara, scrabbling by in ruined Tara, improvises a gown from her mother's velvet curtains. Scarlett needs to charm $300 from Rhett Butler to pay taxes on Tara, and uses every retrieved scrap of the curtains, even the fringe, for a dress. The outfit restores Scarlett's sense of her seductiveness, and Rhett is conned – until he registers her workworn hands, and denies her plea. Walter Plunkett, designing for the film, bleached sun-faded streaks into the velvet and used a tasselled tieback as a girdle; Bob Mackie, pastiching the movie for Carol Burnett's television show, had Scarlett vamp Rhett wearing the curtain pole as well.

Real sartorial heroism tends to be quieter. Unlike Wallis Simpson – all fashion, all the time – Queen >

ILLUSTRATIONS **ANDREW ARCHER**

Bigger than royalty
LEFT Charles James's "Four-Leaf Clover", 1953; worn to a coronation, it outshone the queen

Practical is perfect
CENTRE LEFT Claire McCardell's "Popover", 1942; America's sharp, democratic response to war-work

Advertising the present
ABOVE Yves St Laurent's "Mondrian", 1965; a primary-coloured poster for modernism

Exhibit A
ABOVE LEFT "Madame X", 1883; almost-bare shoulders, and "a strap flung in the face of society"

The colour of money
CENTRE "Gone With the Wind", 1939; Scarlett wore emerald, but still Rhett wouldn't pay

Abide with me
ABOVE RIGHT Norman Hartnell for the Queen Mother, 1939 onwards; the world changed, she didn't

> Elizabeth, the Queen Mother had only two, post-coronation years of chic. In 1938, for a state visit to France, Norman Hartnell put her in white crinolines derived from Winterhalter portraits, lovely reveries for a world without pressing business, let alone immanent total war. What became her more were the plain matching dresses and coats Hartnell, and the firm of Reville and Rossiter, produced in austere accordance with wartime utility regulations – just about within clothing coupon allowances, albeit in superior fabrics elevated by salvaged platinum fox fur, accessorised with pearls and a resolute brooch. Track through monochrome photos of her picking her way among East End rubble and the same dress recurs, a uniform she retained publicly for life. Her daughter, in age, now subscribes to those same three-quarter-sleeved shells. The brooches twinkle on.

The only contender for a best dress I've actually worn was a rather more technological, American approach to war shortages, the work of the Garment District technician and free spirit Claire McCardell, who decided, when Paris and its fashion came under Nazi control, that her compatriots should turn instead to American, industrially manufactured sportswear. Her "Popover" dress – a response to a 1942 challenge from *Harper's Bazaar* for a wartime outfit thrifty in price and materials – was the cheapest possible date at its original price of $6.95 (even her later evening versions never bust $30). "Popover" doesn't quite describe its ingenious and dateless cut. It was a wrap-around housedress – developed from the crossover pinafore that in period drama garbs housewives at sink and wringer – but with a sharp collar, wide sleeves that could be rolled up, and a huge patch pocket, all in washable cotton, topstitched dungaree-style.

If I ever did concede that a big frock might drop 'em all dead – win the prince's heart, or the studio contract, with a single appearance – it would have to be by the eccentric Anglo-American couturier Charles James. Everything James wrought was engineered as much as sewn: soft sculptures balanced on a living figure. His ultimate architecture was his four-leaf-clover gown from 1953, with a 7kg skirt of silk and velvet constructed of four intersecting crinolines, distended not with steel hoops but by an understructure of wide, stiff horsehair braid, canvas and bones. The strapless bodice was seamed to create the fantasy breasts of the American Populuxe era, with its aesthetic of Chevy sedan tail-fins and chamfered Frigidaires. Like most of James's limited output, the dress was a private commission for Mrs William Randolph Hearst junior, in this case intended for her triumphal entry to President Eisenhower's inaugural ball in January 1953. It wasn't finished in time (there are thousands of woman-hours of hand sewing in the skirt's hidden rafters), so she exported it to London – in its own trunk – and wore it

to a coronation ball. Where she must have taken up far more floor space than Her Majesty.

There are times when all that matters is who's inside the dress. The Hollywood costume designer Jean Louis earned a deserved reputation for solving figure difficulties with a satin number for Rita Hayworth in "Gilda", filmed a few weeks after she gave birth: he heat-moulded bars of Perspex to restrain her curves. Marlene Dietrich colluded with Louis over her cabaret wardrobe: body-formed gowns that denied gravity and time – she was then in her 50s – in semi-sheer marquisette and nude soufflé, dyed to match her skin tones, then spangled. When asked in 1962 to outfit Marilyn Monroe to sing "Happy Birthday, Mr President" to John F. Kennedy in Madison Square Garden, he adapted Dietrich's camouflage: the dress, so tight the naked Monroe had to be sewn into it – her rounded tummy crucial to her allure – was a double-strength sheer, strategically beaded. The organisers approved it by daylight, where it looked opaque on its hanger. Under stage lights, the fabric seemed to melt away, and as Senator Adlai Stevenson gasped, Marilyn was up there whispering in "skin and beads".

That was the last of its subtle kind, though. By 1962, the mode was already an unwaisted, sleeveless shift for a breastless figure, shortening by the year until it became the mini. Mini-ness always worked better in dress form, dropped from the shoulder, than as a skirt, especially when the dress was just a blank for graphics – mini-girls were kiosks, postered with modern art, Op, Pop and Abstract. The first "Mondrian" dress, gridded like the artist's paintings, was a 1961 proto-shift by the American wholesale designer Anne Klein. But not until Yves Saint Laurent's Mondrians in 1965 did the idea succeed, partly through couture skill – his colour blocks are marginally shaped to skim the body while suggesting right-angled rectangles and bars – but mostly through abbreviation. An inch longer and they would be a gabby, arty bore.

Generosity with fabric was always the pleasure of the floral frock, which doubled as holiday simplicity and daytime "best dress" of ordinary people, a hopeful allusion to youth. I love Cacharel's Liberty-print frocks – eternal summer blooming still – but the most memorable, and singular, floral was the sheer shift a pregnant Celia Birtwell wore to Kensington Registry Office in 1969 to marry, at long last, Ossie Clark. (Next day he flew off on honeymoon, alone.) Birtwell's late 1960s prints were influenced by Ballets Russes costumes that had recently been auctioned at Christie's; her Goncharova-style, flat jam-tart of a rose print, called "Candy Flower", was on the dress yoke, while the drift to wrists and ankles swirled with Art Deco flowerheads, the "Mystic Daisy" pattern she re-used in her 21st-century Topshop revival. Clark cut the dress with a sashed waist above the baby bulge, >

Now available
ABOVE LEFT Liz Hurley in Versace, 1994; pins together the birth of the red-carpet dress, and Liz's career

Mystic in roots
CENTRE Celia Birtwell's print wedding dress, 1969; softly, florally hippy – and anti established wedding-style

What lies beneath
ABOVE RIGHT Marilyn Monroe in Jean Louis's sheer 'n' sequins, 1962; happy seduction, Mr President

> a shape less difficult than his other pieces. The very idea of a long, soft dress, herbaceous all over, felt radical after two decades of hard, and one of short. And it still seems bold, for all its material delicacy, defying the post-war, white-wedding dress industry.

True, most voters in a recent British poll favoured frocks classifiable not merely as defiance but as conspicuous outrage, their ideal being the Versace black silk and Lycra sheath Liz Hurley wore to the premiere of "Four Weddings and a Funeral" in 1994. In the furore afterwards, Hurley explained that she couldn't afford a dress for the occasion, and when the only sample left in the Versace press office fitted her, gratefully borrowed it. (Plausible, but unconvincing.) The dress was a cartoon. Small cloth spinnakers concealed the nipples though nothing much else; cutouts and slits up, and down, from the hipbones were fastened – which is far too certain a verb – with giant gold safety pins. Gianni Versace claimed these were punk-inspired, though I doubt John Lydon would've so much as spat at it. The real significance of the dress was that it marked the moment in fashion when red-carpet exposure, in every sense, became more important to brand-publicity than the catwalk show.

And the very best of these best of breeds? There is no absolute perfection, only a job well done, and which dress you prefer depends on what task you asked of it. The many votes for the Versace were less for the garment than for the gossip it provoked; but Madame Gautreau's strap flung in the face of society was a sexier scandal, as well as a far stronger design. The James ballgown is an aerodynamic achievement – it doesn't sway or wobble, but glides, the wearer apparently legless beneath it – yet not even Mrs Hearst junior could have felt fond of it.

And this is where I have to admit I'm a dress sceptic. Compared with the power and freedom of Edwardian tailored suits, and the handsome swagger coats of the second world war, a dress so often seems to leave women more vulnerable and incapacitated than a man. Oh, I do admire the textile skills and design in a grand ballgown or wedding dress, but can only laugh at their fantasies of an unleadable, unlivable life. It isn't possible to go to the loo in most ballgowns – do Oscar stylists supply chamber pots? So I'll choose what I believe in: the Popover, that mass-produced dress meant to do an actual job in the house (the prototype came with matching oven glove), office or armaments factory. McCardell's design is democracy in action; its magnificent can-do attitude must have made so many women, of all ages and sizes feel confident, competent and comfortable. Plus they got change from $7. ■

Road bikes

They're light, they're fast – and they're a magnet for thieves. Our undercover expert gets saddle-sore

Cycling makes for a neat solution to two urban preoccupations: commuting and keeping fit. Road bikes are ideal if you want to cycle to work as quickly as possible, and maybe compete in the odd triathlon. But there are many variations on the theme, and it's too easy to end up with one that will sit, unused, in your hallway.

Every bit of a road bike – from skinny tyres to low-slung handlebars – is built for speed, and for tarmac. Comfort is not on the agenda. The riding posture – huddled over to reduce drag – takes some getting used to; the seats are built to be aerodynamic (read, unforgiving); and the high tyre-pressure and non-existent suspension mean you'll feel every pothole. If you're going off-road, get a hybrid bike instead.

After a few hours on an ill-fitting bike, every mile will feel like ten – which is why a good bike shop will start by discussing your reach and height. For women this process is trickier. They typically have a higher leg-to-torso ratio and shorter arms than men, so a man's frame will be uncomfortable. But a classic ladies' bike, with a dropped top-tube, won't be as strong or power-efficient. Specialists such as Condor will build a bike to precisely your measurements, but prices start around £1,250. For something more reasonable, the off-the-peg Specialized Dolce (around £770) has a frame that looks like it's one for the boys, but its proportions are all woman. And if in doubt, take the bike for a test ride.

Bike nerds love to brag about the lightness of their frame – though one study has shown that it's the heaviness of the rider that's more important, at least when it comes to velocity. But one thing a frame's lightness does affect is cost. Carbon-fibre frames are generally the lightest, but average at £1,000 and are infamously brittle. On bad roads they can pick up dangerous fractures that are invisible to the naked eye – and if you crash, the whole bike is a write-off. Titanium doesn't rust, is only marginally heavier than carbon fibre, and is both strong and flexible; unfortunately you'll struggle to find a titanium bike for less than £2,000. Heavier, steel bikes are the traditionalists' choice because they absorb road vibrations well, but they're also tricky to manufacture on an automated production line, so there are fewer affordable models. Most people will do best with an aluminium frame. They're light and stiff enough to be quick, and though they can fatigue and aren't wildly comfortable, you can pick one up for £350. If you want to make every second count, spend a little more on a model with a great competitive record, such as the Cannondale Synapse (£750).

Before you ride off into the sunset, think about security. Even double-locked on the busiest of streets, your lovely new bike runs a very real risk of being stolen or picked clean. YouTube has thousands of videos of bike thieves taking off in under a minute without a single bystander raising the alarm. If you don't have somewhere secure to store a bike, the safest bet is a cheaper model with bolted-on wheels, saddle and handlebars. And if you do leave it on the street, lock it next to a more expensive model – passing crooks will go for that one.

cannondale.com condorcycles.com specialized.com

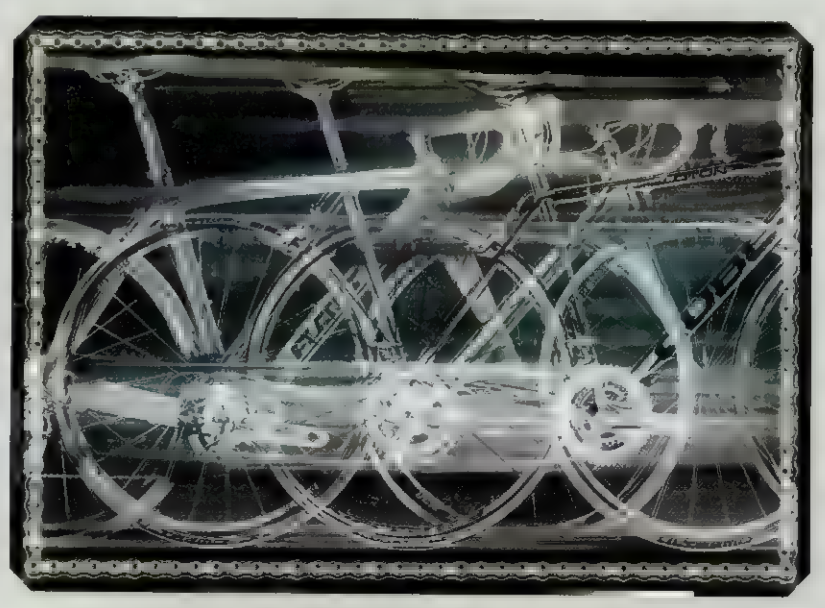


ILLUSTRATION **RICHARD ROCKWOOD**

Rebecca Willis *Applied Fashion*

It's only when you go on holiday that you see how shiny we have become – and what it says about us

ARE YOU HAVING a matt holiday or a shiny one? That's what determines how relaxed you'll be at the end of it. At least, it is according to a theory I evolved last summer, on holiday on the Kenyan island of Lamu. Let me explain. As the beachside days passed, my toenail varnish began to chip – sand is an excellent exfoliant for the feet, but less good for Chanel's Particulière. At first I retouched it (the sly advantage of a dark colour) but soon I just gave up and took it all off. Meanwhile, beach hair set in – salty, lustreless – and it felt better and easier than the shimmering locks we're urged towards by adverts. Putting on make-up, even the tiniest bit, seemed ridiculously self-conscious and try-hard. Call it what you like – laziness, letting go, letting myself go, returning to nature – but one day I realised I was a shine-free zone.

Modern cities are shiny, slick creations of metal and glass, so it follows that getting away from it all should involve the opposite: going matt. That is why patent leather looks fine on Bond Street and weird on a beach, and why those new blackboard-finish cars that glide around London like stealth bombers look so incongruous (though in their case, that's the attention-getting point). It's no coincidence that traditionally glamorous fabrics – silk, satin, velvet – have a sheen that signals sophistication, urbanity. We dress "up" in them, the sartorial version of a skyscraper clad in gleaming glass; but we dress down in textured tweed or grainy denim when we go out of town or to the wide horizons of the seaside.

The dustiest, least shiny place I have ever been is a road in Tanzania that goes past the Olduvai Gorge. The jeeps travelling along it got covered in dust, as if they belonged to the landscape that was doing its utmost to reclaim them. It was at Olduvai that Louis Leakey's excavations proved to the world that man had his origins in Africa, that it was the cradle of mankind. If you choose, you can read the biblical phrases about man being made "from the dust of the ground", and our lives going "from dust to dust" as metaphors for the same. What I'm saying is that matt-ness – or dust – is our fundamental state, and that shiny-ness is the veneer (another shiny word) of civilisation.

Throughout history, shiny things have been synonymous with success and power. The gleam of metal in the Bronze Age signified progress and survival, just as, in America's gold rush, a glint in the panhandler's sieve meant the hope of it. In the crepuscular light of an early Greek Orthodox church, the religious magic of an icon resided in the gleam of its gold paint; in the same way, the bright glow of the dragon's treasure illuminated Beowulf's dark world.

People, though, are not shiny, despite the REM song. Some dark skins have a sheen, but it's only ever an eggshell finish, not high gloss. That's why the oiled limbs of front-row fashionistas and the matching torsos of male models are just plain spooky. Our shine is on the inside – cut open, we glisten – and in our blood, sweat, tears, semen, which can be spilt back into the earth and drain away. We are containers of liquid, and that liquid is literally our life-blood. Without it we return to dust. Is our magpie-like attraction to shiny stuff, then, part of our quest for immortality?

The fragments that we shore against our ruin may shine – gold and jewels, precious metals, steel, polished marble – but they are not in their natural states. Jewels have to be cut, metals smelted. They represent the strivings of man, and the getting of them requires effort. The opposite of all that straining is letting go and not fighting the tidal tug of time. Obviously we wouldn't have evolved as a species if that were our permanent condition, but it's effective for a while, particularly now the shiny bits of life have accelerated to such high speed. So a matt holiday is, by definition, likely to be the most relaxing. That's why it makes sense to forget about the nail varnish and the hair conditioner.

On the way home from Kenya, in a Pavlovian response to arriving at Heathrow, I found myself reaching in my bag for lipstick. I fought the urge. A few days later, the nastiest shiny invention of the modern world came to Lamu, in the hands of Somali pirates. Guns. The world of the tourism-dependent locals was torn apart, and paradise lost. I rest my case. ■

ILLUSTRATION **BILL BROWN**

THE LINE OF BEAUTY

Cats in hats

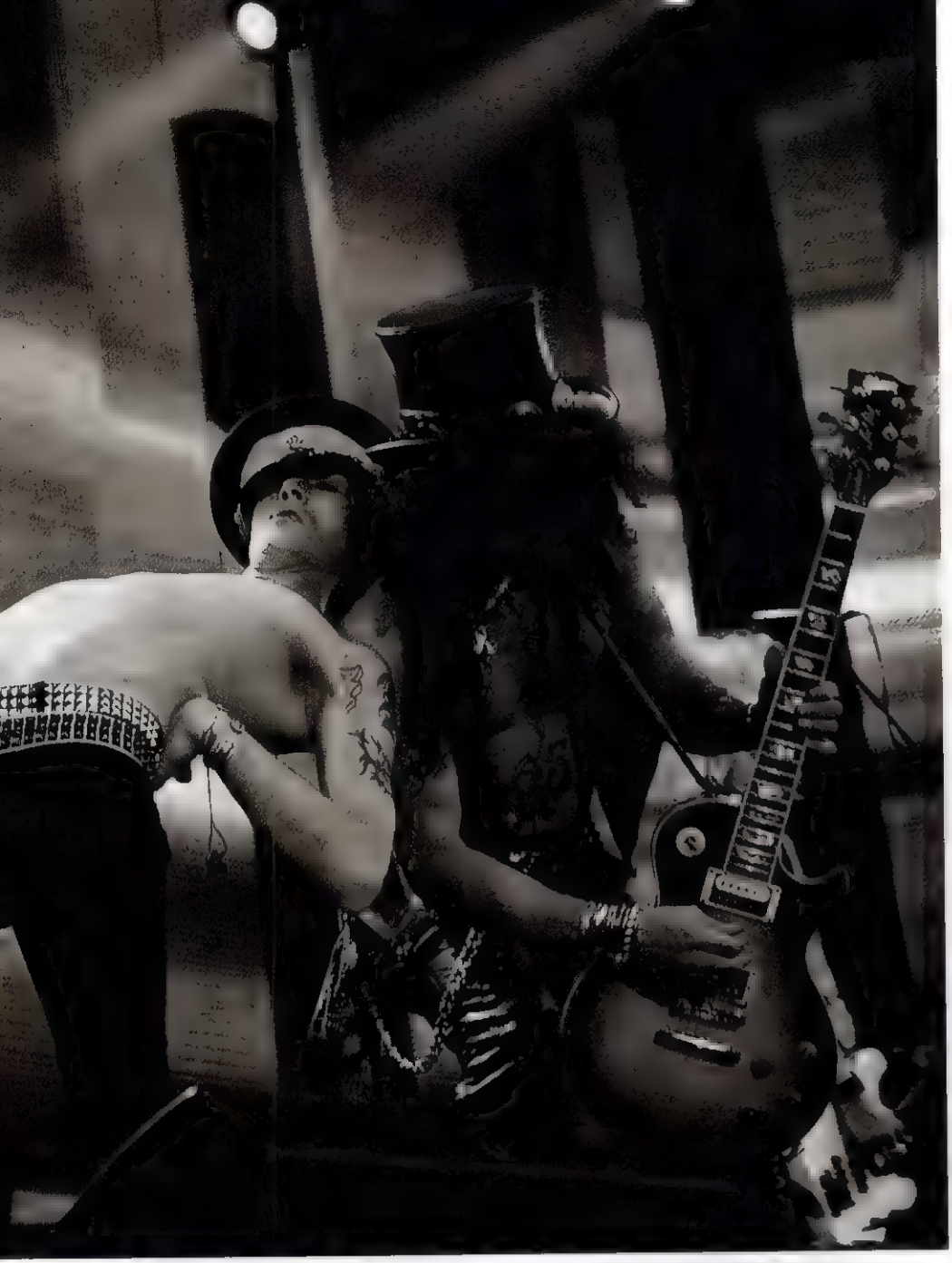
They can signal anything from rebellion and dandyism to folksiness – and cover up a bald spot too. Matthew Sweet tips his cap to rock-star hats and the music they topped off

Hank Williams Country ▶
Most of us look dumb in hats. Rock stars get away with it – rather as they sometimes do with tax offences. That may be some compensation for being disposed to die young, like Hank Williams – who expired, a morphine-fuddled 29-year-old, on the forecourt of a West Virginian gas station. Williams was a country-music revolutionary whose pristine Stetson signalled his radicalism as surely as the Phrygian cap of a sans-culotte. The hat possessed darker powers, too – the man who stole it from the corpse is said to have instantly lost his hair. Not a good look, presumably.

▲ **Bob Dylan** Folk
Today Dylan favours stiff-brimmed Texan numbers suitable for a blackjack game aboard a Mississippi paddle-steamer. Back in 1968 – when he was still Judas to those who had once considered him the second coming of Woody Guthrie – his head is connecting with an older tradition. This is the battered property of the kind of itinerant string-plucker who might have bummed his way across Steinbeck's America. And the wanderer is finally back home: the boy is Dylan's son; Bob might even have chopped those logs himself.

Thelonious Monk Jazz ▶
Thelonious Monk's eccentricity surely began when his parents registered "Sphere" as his middle name – but hats proved its most visible sign as he shambled between the world's pianos. So who bagged this animal for him? Ceausescu? Elmer Fudd? History records the answer: on the steps of a plane at Helsinki airport, he was greeted by a gang of admirers in these lambswool plant-pots. "Man, we got to have those," he breathed. When he wore one on the stage of the Kulttuuritalo, 2,500 Finns went mad – though not as mad as him, of course.

MAGNUM COUNTRY MUSIC HALL OF FAME AND MUSEUM EYEVINE CORBIS GETTY



▲ **Slash** Hard rock
The dignity of the rock hat is a fragile mystery: how, for instance, can a middle-aged man wear a beanie and call himself "the Edge" without dying of embarrassment? Slash, beneath his leather topper, stays mysteriously on the right side of preposterous. He's having sex de chapeau here with Scott Weiland in the supergroup Velvet Revolver – the "Avengers Assemble" of trailer-park kerrang. But to us he will always be the lead guitarist of Guns N' Roses. Slash is from Hampstead. He knows, surely, that he is a kind of steampunk burlesque act – even if not all of his fans can see it.

▼ **Brian Jones** Stoned rock
Mick Jagger and Marianne Faithfull thought it a lark to dress up as Oscar and Bosie, but Jones of the Stones was the true heir to 1890s dandyism: the crushed-velvet jackets, the Aubrey Beardsley haircut – and this bleached halo of white felt, sufficiently flamboyant to earn anyone an insulting note from the Marquess of Queensberry. It's the not-quite-drag element that puts this hat ahead: imagine it crowning Elton John. Or John Hurt in "The Naked Civil Servant". Or Pam Grier in Blaxploitation mode. A shame Jones didn't live to see them keeping up with him.

◀ **John Lee Hooker** Blues
Old bluesmen of John Lee Hooker's Deep South stripe were relics of a world in which all men wore hats, unless they were being respectful to a lady. But even on the Delta, a handmade beaver-felt fedora was hardly inconspicuous. Like the shades, the hat draws the eye as it affects to deflect its notice. I'm nobody, it says, I'm just some guy. I'm that son of a sharecropper from Clarksdale who happened to invent a new old way of singing the blues.

>

Tom Waits Junkyard blues

The voice, we know, is good for a whisky ballad – but would be just as fine for ballyhooing the public into losing a dollar for a glimpse of the Amazing Alligator Girl. That hat, too, bespeaks the side-show as much as the roadhouse. In this moment, though, Tom Waits is taking the advice of someone older and smoother. "Cock your hat," said Frank Sinatra. "Angles are attitudes." An acute observation. Waits's fingers fracture the air around his fedora. Georges Braque could have painted him, and he wouldn't have had to change a thing.

Aswad Reggae

Their co-founder, Brinsley Forde, spent his short-trousered years in "Here Come The Double Deckers", crime-fighting TV kids who lived in a bus. Aswad, however, had the fortune to thrive before VHS – and so remained the bold voice of a black British cultural consciousness, the first Britons in leather berets whom the public got to know. Despite the cold stare, this is the band at rest. Locks confined, sheepskin lapels akimbo. On "Top of the Pops", they combined those Rasta hats with the pinstripe suits of white authority. Reggae never looked more excitingly domestic.

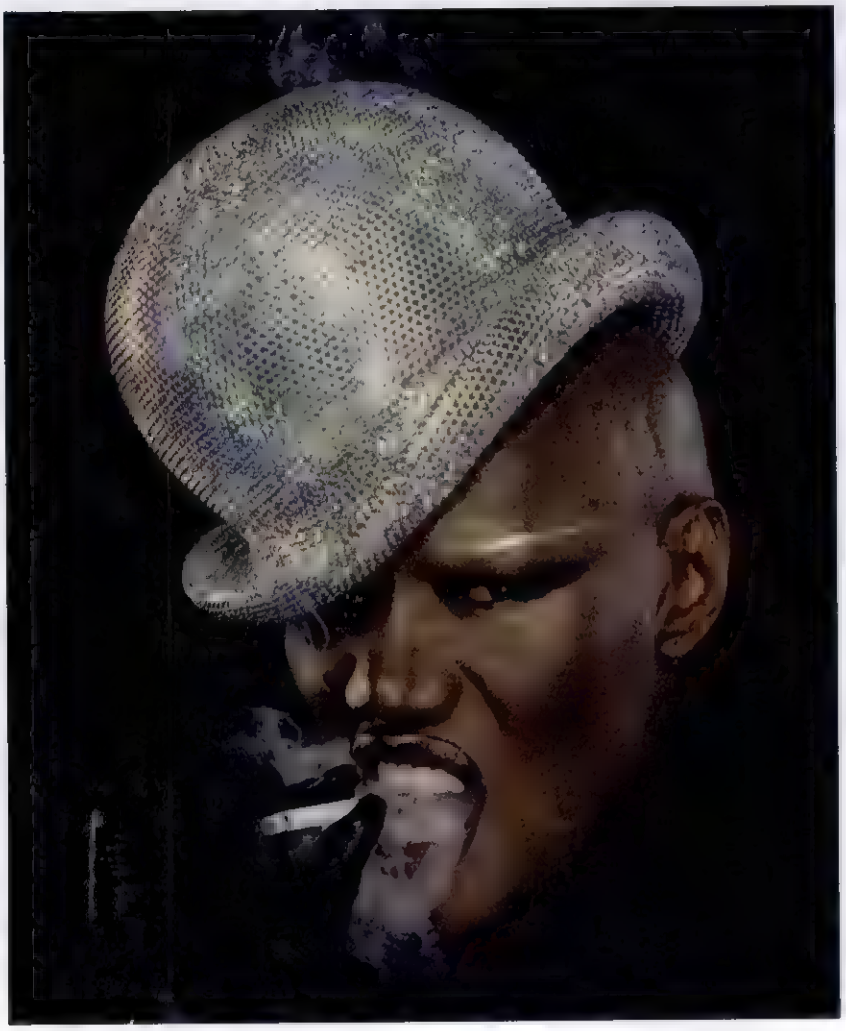
Marc Bolan Glam

Like a mahogany hat-stand recovered from a junk shop and painted lilac, glam rock reclaimed the top hat and made it an accessory to its subversive project – bringing a touch of Weimar razzmatazz to the era of the Angry Brigade and the three-day week. Despite the glitter, Bolan wears his topper straight: there's no Marlene tilt to this man's brim. It's more a cornucopia from which surges that black mass of ringlets, at a moment when Bolan's strength seemed Samson-like – and before his life was cut brutally short.

GETTY JEAN PAL GOLDE

◀ **Run DMC** Hip hop
This fedora-and-leather combination inverts the image established by Aswad: here the head supports the symbol of authority, while the torso is wrapped in the studded texture of rebellion. Run DMC had perfect command of this imagery, but how much did they know about Kangol, the firm whose headwear they gave their tacit endorsement? It was founded in 1938 by Jakob Spreiregen, a generous funder of the Revolutionary Communist Party. "You five-dollar boy and I'm a million-dollar man," Run DMC rapped. "Youse a sucker MC, and you're my fan." Not a sentiment you'll find in Trotsky.

▲ **Pete Doherty** Indie
What sits on Pete Doherty's head has received almost as much attention as what courses through his veins. Some wag has uploaded a stop-motion YouTube video depicting the Babyshambles frontman finding his trademark black trilby in a Brighton branch of Oxfam. A firm randy for teenage cash offers £25 replicas that are guaranteed – terrifyingly – to bring "a Vintage suaveness to any Indie persona". The hat Doherty wears here for a Spanish gig is a wide-brimmed variant with a touch of toreador – an impression amplified by that mike held aloft like an estoque. Who is he sticking? Himself, probably.



◀ **Grace Jones** Dance
Grace Jones may be a human being, but the photographic evidence suggests otherwise. My own theory is that she was created by Wyndham Lewis in the jazz age, and escaped from a private collection in the early 1980s. The glitterball bowler ought to be naff – didn't the magician Paul Daniels wear one of these in his bunco booth? Instead it is forcefully phallic, and borrows those plumes of cigarette smoke as if it had produced them itself. It rocks. She rocks. And that's magic. ■

MAN IN A SUIT

Peter Frankopan

A historian who is also a hotelier

THE MAN

It is tempting to describe 40-year-old Peter Frankopan – historian, hotelier, Croatian prince and father of four – as a Renaissance man, but it's not his period. Ever since a lecture at Cambridge left him "transfixed, as if I'd been given a triple espresso", it's the Byzantine empire that has sent his pulse racing. Now senior research fellow at Worcester College, Oxford, and director of the Centre for Byzantine Research, he has published a book – "The First Crusade: The Call from the East" – challenging a millennium of historical assumption about why western knights set off on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem in 1096. "Embarking on academic research is like going down a mine," says Frankopan. "I struck gold."

At almost 300 pages, and written with rapid-fire enthusiasm, "The First Crusade" also challenges assumptions that books by academics should be as big as breeze-blocks and bristling with footnotes. It matters to Frankopan that discoveries made during "dusty days in the Bodleian" should be accessible to the general reader, just as it matters that he is rooted in the 21st century as well as the 11th. Ten years ago, lounging on the sofa, he and his wife Jessica dreamed up their perfect hotel – the kind of place they might go for a romantic weekend; relaxed, but with a good eye for contemporary art and design. Within six months, they had bought Cowley Manor in the Cotswolds; they have since added L'Hotel, Oscar Wilde's former home in Paris, and Canal House in Amsterdam.

Before setting off on the school-run with his children, Frankopan scrutinises the hotel trading figures. If one moment he's considering how starving Crusaders were driven to "eat the flesh from the buttocks of dead Muslims", the next he's likely to be organising the repair of an extractor fan in Amsterdam. The hotels, he insists, enhance the history: "Hiring and firing staff has taught me a lot about the subtleties of human nature, and that's informed my thinking about the motivations of medieval knights." It's not surprising that Frankopan feels permanently short of sleep. But asked which parts of his life he might choose to edit out, the answer is none. "I'm like one of those circus turns spinning plates on sticks. The maths tells me that eventually a plate must crash, but I get better and better at the spinning."

THE SUIT

For a day of study, Frankopan likes a slim-cut, Italian suit – "to feel a little edgy as I pace the Bodleian". But outside the library he is "Mediterranean enough" to enjoy a little more flamboyance. We dressed him in a mid-blue suit by Paul Smith, who cuts particularly well for tall, slim men, adding a touch of swagger with a linen paisley-printed scarf from Etro, a double-cuffed checked shirt and a rose-pink spotted tie. The overall effect delighted him: "You don't want to be a peacock displaying all your plumage, but you want to show a bit." - MAGGIE FERGUSSON

THE DETAILS

Slim-fit wool suit, £520, and silk tie, £69, both by Paul Smith; cotton shirt, £39.50, Sartorial range at M&S; scarf, £160, Etro; brown leather brogues, £110, Savile Row Inspired range at M&S; Rolex watch, model's own

Stockists *etro.com marksandspencer.com paulsmith.co.uk*

PHOTOGRAPHER **NEIL GAVIN** STYLIST **OLIVIA POMP**

Stylist's assistant ***Rany Berger***

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FIGHT THE GOOD FIGHT

WOMEN'S BOXING IS ABOUT TO JOIN THE OLYMPICS. AMONG ITS BIGGEST FIGURES IS A PETITE INDIAN WITH FIVE WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS AND TWO SMALL CHILDREN, WHO HAS HAD TO BATTLE AGAINST FAR MORE THAN JUST HER OPPONENTS IN THE RING. **RAHUL BHATTACHARYA** PROFILES THE PHENOMENAL MARY KOM

"One *plays* football. One does not *play* boxing."
–Joyce Carol Oates, "On Boxing"

PLAY, OR ITS Hindi equivalent, *khel*, is the verb Mary Kom uses. She could be referring to a tournament, "when I played national", her stance, "I play southpaw", or her weight category, "I must play in 51kg in the Olympics." But there is something deeper when Kom says it. Childbirth and child-rearing, that is life. Lifting yourself out of poverty, fulfilling the duties of a wife, a daughter, an eldest sister, that is life. Boxing is so much; but still it is play.

She is in the ring right now, and to be ringside when Mary Kom is in action is to feel the kinetic heat of boxing. It is molecular. She is padding against a man whom, a little while ago, in his spectacles, sweater and moustache, I took for a government officer. Now, shorn of the first two, he has transformed himself into a provocateur, a matador. He is baiting Mary, taunting her with words and jabs in the face. When their heads come together, their spit and sweat fall on each other, the blazing whites of their eyes are falling into each other's. Kom is 5ft 2in officially, an inch more in her own estimate, but looks smaller – even more so in her headgear. Small, but taut: a packet of tensile strength.

Her muscles must be on fire. Counting her rounds against the bag, the mirror and the other women at the camp, national- and international-level boxers, she has completed the equivalent of two full-length competition bouts. Those girls were heavier and taller. This is just as well because when women's boxing debuts at the 2012 Olympics, Mary must play taller opponents, who will have a longer reach. Most of her championship victories have come as a pinweight boxer, 46kg, whereas in London the lightest class, flyweight, is 51kg.

But next to Mary, these other girls were ponderous. Their feet were sluggish, their positioning not so clever. She could fight with her guard down, testing her reflexes by offering them her bare chin as a target, and counter-attacking in angles unfamiliar to boxers who take the orthodox stance.

All around the gym the girls furtively watched her. They covet her low-gravity wound-up springiness, her pure petite explosiveness. They would love to lunge so wide and fast, and never need to wrestle or go to the ropes. Aggression is her hallmark, and it makes her exhilarating to watch.

"*Yeh leh* Mary," Mr Bhaskar Bhatt goads her, "take this. And this." This too is the play of boxing.

"He tries to make me angry," she says later, "but I have to be cool." Her grimace is hidden by her white gumshield. You can feel her burn; it's been 80 minutes now.

"*Aaja* Mary, *sha-baash*, come Mary, come." This is a "specific training" session, devoted to feints and combination punches. He's making her chase him, holding up his pad for her to pull out another series of rifling combination punches, which she does with sharp yelp-like breaths.

"Phoom." That is the sound she wants from a punch. "When it's tak, tak, like that, it is OK, not powerful," she will say, throwing me a mock punch. "Phoom! That is powerful."

At last the session is finished. "60%," says Mr Bhatt, bespectacled again, assessing a fortnight's progress. "She has not come into her original yet. Once she does that, when she >

PORTRAIT **IAN WINSTANLEY**

MONNET
Steel | Power | Mining
INDIA

> rely on state awards (which don't always reach her) and the salary from a sports-quota position with the Manipur police. Offered the designation of constable on winning her first world championship, she declined it. A few years later she accepted the post of sub-inspector, on a monthly salary of 8,500 rupees (£100). Following two promotions and a landmark government pay-scale revision, she still only draws 31,000 rupees a month (£360), a trifle in inflationary times. Since 2009, when she signed up with a talent management firm, Infinity Optimal Solutions, a few modest sponsorship deals have come her way.

Against this are the multimillion-rupee endorsements for cricketers, and the player auctions for the Indian Premier League, where talent more ordinary than hers is bought for £1m for a six-week tournament. This astonishes Mary, and she pauses for thought, totting up the grants, awards and deals through five world championships. "In ten years I have not made total of even one crore (£125,000)."

In the front yard, below the tamarind tree in which little Rengpa and Nainai have managed to entangle their helicopter, is a small room made of bamboo and asbestos. Five girls live in this room, students at the MC (Mangte Chungneijang) Mary Kom Boxing Academy. Meant for poor Manipuri boys and girls, the academy is free.

The sanction of state land has been pending for five years, so it remains what in other parts of the world might be considered an anomaly: a boxing academy without a ring. Training in the denuded hills and the field opposite the house, strengthening their bodies on a modest set of donated equipment under a small tin shed in the domestic yard, 21 of the 30-odd students won a medal at the last state championships.

FIVE GIRLS LIVE IN A SMALL ROOM IN MARY'S YARD. STUDENTS AT THE MARY KOM BOXING ACADEMY. IT HAS NO BOXING RING. THEY TRAIN IN THE FIELD OPPOSITE

For the girls, especially, Mary is an inspiration; and because she is home for a few days, there is to be a minor presentation ceremony. They will receive training gear. The sports ministry donates these packs, 25 annually. By the time they reach the academy, pilfering has reduced it to about 18.

In her address to her students, Mary is animated, maternal, full of gestures and modulations. Freed from the constraints of English and Hindi, she talks for 25 minutes in Meiteilon, the lingua franca of Manipur. "You are lucky," she tells them. "I can at least go and ask for support for you. Don't ever look back in your life, that you are from a poor family – no. Go ahead in your life, ahead ahead ahead."

Mary's husband Onler manages the academy, along with her career – and, when she is away, their twins, with the help of his mother-in-law. He himself has a bantamweight's physique. The two met in Delhi when Mary was a young athlete struggling on her visits to the big city. Onler, nine years older and then president of the Kom community club in Delhi, took her under his wing, and over time became a combination of mentor, motivator and manager, the man behind the woman.

Like all of Manipur's hill tribes, the Koms, a tiny community, were converted by proselytising British missionaries, who first came to the region in the late 19th century. Both Mary and Onler are devout: "Jesus 100 percent" were the words they once printed on her boxing gown.

At Christmas 2006, returning home from Onler's village in Samulamlan Block, they received a series of phone calls and texts, saying that Onler's father had been called out of the house by a group of men, taken a short distance away, and shot in the head at point-blank range. He was a parson and the village chief. There was no demand, no warning, no apparent motive. They had left him only hours earlier, and the mood was festive. The closest Onler can come to making sense of the murder is jealousy: of Mary's success and his marriage to her.

When he recounts the incident, in harrowing detail, it is a journey into the heart of the Manipuri situation of UGs and C-in-Cs, underground groups and their commanders-in-chief. There are some 40 ethnic groups in Manipur, and about

Home fixture
LEFT Mary Kom at home in Manipur with her husband and manager, Onler, and their four-year-old twins
BELOW Mary serves dinner; she'll eat after her guests

as many armed UGs which, though often rivals, together form a kind of parallel government. Two of the boys involved in the murder – there were eyewitnesses in the house – were apprehended by a UG two years later, says Onler, and even confessed in front of journalists. But Onler refused to make a "donation" to the UG; the C-in-C made sure the news was spiked, and the killers roam free.

Shortly after the killing, Onler remembers thinking that "it is better I should leave my family and take the gun and go direct to the people who are doing this. There was a complete darkness in the family. We doesn't want to eat anything, doesn't want to drink, we are just quiet. Mary wanted to give up her glove. I convince her not to."

"If I'm doing well and people are jealous, it is better to give up my glove, no?" Mary asked herself. "If there is another incident, what shall I do?" She was 23 at the time and had just won her third world championship. Her father-in-law had surprised her by supporting a married woman's decision to box for a career, and she never forgot that.

A few weeks after the funeral, Mary felt unwell. At the clinic, the doctor told the couple that she had conceived. "My mind was blowing!" Onler says. "It was something like a miracle. I give up all the dirty thoughts I had for leaving the house." His father too had been a twin.

Less than two years after her father-in-law was murdered, after she considered giving up the game, 15 months after she gave birth to twins by Caesarean section, Mary claimed her fourth world title. She remembers the utter weakness when she returned to training, the aches and pains that still persist four years later, in her knees and especially her back. In order to train, she stopped breastfeeding after a year. Sometimes sourcing Lactogen in Imphal would be difficult when insurgents enforced highway blockades that could run for weeks. A blockade in 2011 lasted four months: like many Manipuris, she cooked on a woodfire.

"I have to do it," she told herself during her comeback. "My family is a big family. I'm looking after all of them. My father's family, my sister also, cousin sister also. If we win gold medal, we are getting incentive from the state, the company side, sponsor side. So I tell myself, I can do, I can do, that's it."

The evenings in Manipur, which is far out east but follows Indian Standard Time, arrive absurdly early, and dusk brings a quickening emptiness to the streets of Imphal. The hills facing Mary Kom Road are taller and lovelier in the dark; the pig in her back yard – no pinweight, at least 60kg by Onler's reckoning – is more vocal. If the family ever steps out after dusk it is with "two to three boys or cousins" who are boxers or martial artists. Onler has weapons for self-

defence, but the private security officer assigned to them by the Manipur police does not: the state discontinued the practice after some officers let out their guns for hire.

For dinner Mary, the domestic provider, cooks in the Kom style: beef fry, pork with broccoli, fish and roe flavoured with desiccated citrus peels, and boiled mustard leaves. She stands by the table, listening, as a guest, a friend of theirs, says that his new tractor was captured a few hours ago by a UG for "tax collection". Nainai, slung in a shawl, is strapped to Mary's back; Rengpa has exhausted himself to sleep. Mary >

> will eat once her guests have finished, and early in the morning she will train her students in the field across the road.

IT IS EARLY February, and the season is cold and dry. The fields, the day, are colourless but for the gorgeous *phaneks* and shawls of girls strolling or bicycling. In the village of Kangethei, in the front yard of the house where Mary grew up, are cacti and fern and croton, and tall bamboo whose lushness betrays the fallow fields. In the rear garden are peas, onion, garlic, mustard, beans, banana. There are two structures in the neatly groomed plot, neither permanent: a front shed of tin, and along one side, living quarters of bamboo and mud.

The roosters are running around, pecking at the grain that Mangte Akham Kom is spreading out to dry. She is a lady of handsome proportion: when she accompanied her daughter on a trip to Myanmar, it was she, not Mary, who found herself encased in a garland. The shock is meeting her husband, Mangte Tonpa Kom, in the way it is shocking and moving to encounter a parent of the opposite gender so identical to their child. He has Mary's small but uncreasable body, tight and tough, with similar definition on the arms, the same erectness of the back, and the body language of a doer. The bones on their face are alike, as is their expression of reserve – and of great reserves. Ask Akham Kom where Mary gets her fearlessness, and she will point to Tonpa Kom.

"Yes, when I observe her," Tonpa Kom says, "I can see she is very much my blood. After all she is my first daughter." A village wrestling champion and an ace marksman in his youth, Tonpa Kom has been a farmhand since the age of 15.

ONE DAY, MARY'S FATHER SAW AN ITEM IN THE PAPER ABOUT A YOUNG STATE BOXING CHAMPION. COULD IT BE HER? BOXING WAS NOT A SPORT FOR GIRLS

He is a talkative, interesting man, full of long, precise anecdotes, which come to me translated from the Kom language by Jimmy, a young man who helps Onler manage Mary and the academy. On one aspect, however, Tonpa Kom is not keen to elaborate: his struggles to feed a poor family. This would be self-indulgent; he is not that kind of man. Mary's younger brother and mother disagree, and in the family discussion that follows the English word "history" is thrown up often. "History is history," that is what his wife and son tell him, "and you should not hide it."

So Tonpa Kom tells his life story, as a woodcutter, a fisherman, a butcher and a charcoal burner. At one point he tried a business bringing cows from faraway to sell to villagers locally; when he had saved some money, he bought a cow and a cart, which he would hire out. Akham Kom, washing dishes by the well, adds that she wove shawls to boost their income.

Mary helped, and also worked in the fields with her parents.

One day, after Mary had gone away to Imphal, Tonpa Kom saw an item in the newspaper about a young state boxing champion. The name was a mangled version of Mary's, but the girl seemed to be of the Kom tribe, about Mary's age. Could it be her? This was not a happy prospect: she had gone to pursue athletics, not to box. Boxing was not a sport for girls, and any bruising to her face would seriously hinder her chances of finding a good husband. Disturbed, he dispatched Akham Kom to Imphal to look into the matter. On the way she ran into Mary, returning home triumphant with her gold medal.

Her mother's view, according to Mary, is "any time OK". But Tonpa Kom was quiet for a few days. Mary cajoled him, explaining that, as an amateur, she wore headgear and would not get injured. After a while he decided that maybe she had chosen what was correct for her. But how would he support her financially? Mary told him, "Don't worry. I will never trouble you. I will work hard. When other girls are spending ten rupees, I will spend one rupee." From then on, he told himself, "I will do whatever I have to do. I will sacrifice myself if need be."

To help fund her training, equipment and travel, he sold the family cow for 14,000 rupees (£175) and borrowed money. When Mary began winning, and incentives started coming her way, he paid off the loans. Now her career has reached a stage that he no longer needs to live the way he does. People tell him it does not become the father of a world champion. But this is

Weights and measures
Mary's first boxing coach, Ibomcha Singh, initially rejected her for being too small. She has fought mostly at 46kg, but has had to adjust to 51kg for the Olympics

the only way he knows. Besides, his other children – two girls and a boy, the youngest just nine – are not yet successful like Mary, and they need to learn their lessons.

MOST INDIANS HAVE never been abroad. Mary has fought in places that would seem extraordinary to them: Astana in Kazakhstan, Pecs in Hungary, Tonsberg in Norway, Hanoi in Vietnam, Antalya in Turkey. Once there, she adjusts the way she did on early trips to other parts of India, with sign language and improvisation. "Asia-side" she likes the food and manages fine; in Europe she finds it too sweet, but enjoys the breakfasts, usually skips dinner and makes do with the excellent variety of fruit. She fights against South-East Asians, Americans, eastern Europeans, athletes from vastly more sophisticated systems – in China, it's one coach for every boxer.

In March she was in Ulan Bator, Mongolia, for the Asian women's boxing championships. Her opponent in the final was Ren Cancan of China. "She is very clever," Kom says, which is the highest praise she bestows upon a boxer, though here it comes with an edge. Cancan is 5ft 6in, and the reigning 51kg world champion. The first time Mary fought in this category, in the 2010 Guangzhou Asian Games, she met Cancan in the semi-final and lost 7-11. Tempestuous in defeat, she felt Cancan had fouled all through the bout and the referee didn't catch her. The talk, subsequently, was whether it was possible for Mary to adapt to this weight class, whether, in fact, India's entry would be better filled by her accomplished state-mate L. Sarita Devi, who has won a world championship at 52kg. Four of Mary's five championships have come as a 46kg pinweight. At the Olympics there are only three weight categories for women, as opposed to ten for men.

The weight category is no small matter, especially for Indians, who, a national-level woman boxer tells me, are so insecure that from "15 till retirement" they look to fight in the same class. And so the national championships are full of starving boxers, surviving on glucose biscuits, reluctant even to drink a glass of water before their weigh-in.

With a champion's cold fury, Mary worked her way up two weight classes in three years to 51kg. She had to bulk up without slowing down. She had to work on a tight defence against bigger boxers. Before Ulan Bator, she went into training in Pune with the veteran British coach Charles Atkinson – underwritten by Olympic Gold Quest and a ministry grant. She was the first woman Atkinson had coached, and her sparring partners in Pune were men.

In the final, she used her improved guard to negate Cancan's reach. She pulled out combinations unusual for her, double jabs and a right, to go with the big left hook that is her signature. She won 14-8.

As a preparation for the Olympic qualifiers in May, this was excellent – though not quite enough. In her new weight category she had fought the Asians, but never faced the Europeans.

At the qualifiers in Qinhuangdao, China, seeded seventh, she reached the quarter-finals as expected and came up against the second seed, Nicola Adams from Leeds in England. Minutes after the fight, Mary was on the phone to Onler. "Papa," she said, addressing him as mothers sometimes do the father of their children, "I have lost." It was a close bout, 11-13. She was angry with the judging, as competitors often are in a sport where the scoring is subjective.

For the first time in the history of the women's world boxing championships, there was no medal for Mary Kom. But she wasn't thinking about that. Her qualification for London was in danger, and, worse, it was no longer in her hands. For Mary to go through, under the complex qualifying rules, Adams would have to win her semi-final, against a Russian.

For two days in Manipur, Onler sat tight, nervous. So much was riding on this. In China, Mary shopped recklessly. In the end, her conqueror got her off the hook (before losing the final to Cancan, and also complaining about the scoring).

"I can breathe again," Onler said.

Mary, reverting to a winner's mentality, said she had not had doubts. "Yes, I was sure I would qualify. The Russian, I knew she wasn't so good, she would lose to Nicola." >

> What about Nicola herself? "She is OK, quite good. She is quite defensive, she has a fast jab. Europeans are not so clever as Asians. I think I will beat her." She points to her head with a playful gleam. "I have her in my mind now."

Few Indians have ever seen Mary box, because barely any of her tournaments are televised or even streamed online. Her feats end up buried in the back pages, usually in the Sport in Brief. But when she returned from Qinhuangdao as the first and only Indian woman boxer to have qualified for the Olympics, the press was interested at last.

This is why Mary needs London: it is why every Indian athlete other than the cricketers and a handful of tennis stars needs the Olympics. It will define them. It could transform their fortunes, validate their efforts, their life. But unlike the weightlifters and archers and the growing contingent of male boxers who may confront their destiny two or three or four times over a career, London is Mary's first and only chance. By Rio de Janeiro in 2016, she will be 33, and too old.

When she walks the streets of Delhi with her fellow north-eastern athletes, they are sometimes mistaken for Nepali domestic help. "I tell them we are not Nepali, we are Manipuri, so don't speak like that, this is very bad manners." At other times they are taunted with the gibberish dispensed to those with oriental features: "Something ching ching ching ching they start speaking, I don't know what. Even they don't know what! We are feeling bad. We are Indian. Ya, the face is different. But heart is Indian."

This sentiment could be attacked by the more extreme Manipuri insurgents. But if Mary retires as an Olympic gold-medallist, she knows her life will be forever changed; and with it, a little bit, her country's standing in the world.

FOOTAGE OF HER fights is not easy to track down. The national broadcaster Doordarshan, private sports channels, her own agents, Olympic Gold Quest – nobody can supply it. After a fortnight of hard pursuit, a solitary bout emerges on an unlabelled CD in the boxing federation office from a mass of discs in a paper bag. Another is found on Jimmy's hard disk in Manipur. They are from Podolsk, Russia, 2005, and Barbados, 2010, both world championships.

The bouts are shot on single hand-held cameras with no commentary. They have the air of an underground activity, like 19th-century prizefighting.

But amateur boxing – or Olympic-style boxing, as it is beginning to be called – is a very different beast from prizefighting, then or now. There is no prize money, no pounding music or showboating MCs, no showbiz bright lights blazing around the ancient glamour of blood. Nobody dies in these bouts; knock-outs are rare. Especially in the lighter categories, the boxers dance on the dazzling borderline between fisticuffs and fencing. They feint and prance and lunge to find openings off which to score. Scoring is a subjective and contentious

affair: at least three of the five judges must instantly concur that a punch is substantial and delivered by the "knuckle part" of a "closed glove" to the legitimate target zone, between the stomach and the head, on the front or sides of the body. Without an electronic scoreboard, the audience would be lost.

Even by the standards of pinweights, Mary is so quick that judges regard her bouts as about the hardest task in the women's game. At Podolsk, her opponent is a Korean (the difficulty level of this bout she recalls with the Indianism "fifty-fifty"). To watch Mary, 22 years old and 46kg light, is to watch the physical equivalent of a raconteur of irrepressible wit and repartee. It feels like pugilism.

In the breaks, the women's coach Anoop Kumar rubs down her arms and legs. There is something wonderful in this unselfconscious athletic intimacy among countrymen who might be segregated by gender on public transport; in a country, indeed, where women boxers were initially asked, in the interests of modesty, to wear T-shirts under their vests.

As the clock ticks on in the contest, something raw cracks through the balletic Brownian motion. Grunts can be heard, the odd wild haymaker appears. There is something more existential at stake: boxing, where metaphor is meaningless because here it is what it is. Mary has never felt pain in a ring, or fear; those are areas she forbids her mind to go. What she does sometimes feel is the title of her favourite song,

A gym with no ring
Local boys training in a field across from Mary Kom's home

"Lonely", by the Senegalese pop star Akon. Early in the last round, she throws a strong right off-balance to the head of the Korean, which forces her into a standing eight-count. The vulnerability in her opponent flares like a rage in Mary's movements; she stalks her nervous prey around the ring, showing the killer instinct that figures in every appraisal of her.

When she wins, she takes her bows and is carried aloft briefly by Anoop in celebration. "I thank God," she says pointing upwards, as the camera follows her, "God."

In Barbados, five years later, women's boxing has come on. The referee is a woman; the number of rounds has increased from three to four, and Mary herself has had to move up to flyweight, 48kg, the new lightest category. For once she is taller than her opponent, a Romanian, whom, she recalls dismissively, she has defeated twice before. By this stage, she says, she is a smart boxer, an all-round boxer, she can dance around her opponent and study her for a whole round if required. She could finish a championship final without feeling spent.

There is another crucial difference: the women are both wearing skirts. It was the first tournament to feature skirts, and when the boxing association recommended them for the Olympics, it caused a furore. An online petition called it a "ludicrous recommendation [that] only serves to enforce gender stereotypes", and collected 55,000 signatures. The skirt was made optional. Mary finds it comfortable and attractive, and if the Indian boxing federation had issued skirts for London, she would have liked to wear one.

"Men fighting men to determine worth (ie, masculinity) excludes women as completely as the female experience of childbirth excludes men," wrote Joyce Carol Oates. "Raw aggression is thought to be the peculiar province of men, as nurturing is the peculiar province of women. (The female boxer violates this stereotype and cannot be taken seriously – she is parody, she is cartoon, she is monstrous.)"

Mary Kom violates the stereotype of the violating stereotype. This is her extraordinary achievement. Raw aggression, childbirth, nurturing, teaching, are all her province. She enjoys doing her nails and visiting the beauty parlour, loves raising her children, and yes, she will fight with a skirt on. These aren't contradictions. She is not closing worlds, she is expanding them.

As she wins, again Anoop holds her aloft, one hand briefly fanning out in the air to signify her fifth world title. Waiting her turn at the podium, she asks her team-mates to pass her the Indian flag, and wraps herself in it. The hand-held camera pans to the ascending flags as the Indian national anthem plays, and you think: the nation which recognises Mary Kom would be a better nation.

"THE FEMALE BOXER", WROTE JOYCE CAROL OATES, "CANNOT BE TAKEN SERIOUSLY - SHE IS PARODY, SHE IS CARTOON, SHE IS MONSTROUS"

There is a video online, a tribute to Mary by a Manipuri rock band. In the montage of visuals is a shot of her weeping while addressing a gathering of young students. Why, I ask her, what made her emotional?

"I was giving a speech about my story, how I'm doing my boxing. So first when I start boxing, it's very very hard, I'm doing a lot of struggle. My family cannot give me full financial support. As a player we are supposed to have good shoes, good dress, no? Whatever my family is getting for me, I used to wear and play. I'm fighting five years without any good diet. No supplement, no egg. No breakfast. Just lunch and dinner, vegetable only and rice. Sometimes when the relative I am staying with in Imphal, when he gets salary, then we get meat. Once a month, yes, exactly. So I get emotional." She laughs at the thought of her tears, as she always laughs.

And if you ask the phenomenal Mary Kom what makes a world champion, she will say: "Boxer has to be smart. Boxer has to be strong. But main is will. Main is will." ■

Olympic women's boxing Excel, London, August 5th-9th

What is the best sport?

THE BIG QUESTION

At the Olympics, 26 sports compete for our attention, and some big ones are not even there. Five writers choose their favourite, while **Matthew Engel** sets the scene

A LONG TIME ago, as a young sports reporter on my first overseas assignment – the 1978 Commonwealth Games in Canada – I was despatched to cover the wrestling. Memory suggests it was Greco-Roman wrestling; the internet says it must have been freestyle. (Both versions are always in the Olympics.) Whichever – it bore no relation to the simple grunt-and-groan

times, otherwise known as the Olympics, also fail that test.

What we can say is that all sports fall into four categories. There are races: on foot, on horseback, on water, in water, in cars – including races where the human element is indirect, like greyhound racing. There are fights: boxing, fencing, wrestling, etc. There are ball games. And there are competitive dis-

> if the bases are loaded and Albert Pujols is at the plate.

Athletics and swimming loom large at the Olympics. Yet they attract little attention for 206 weeks out of every 208. For good reason. At the pool, you can't even see the competitors properly. The only point in watching a marathon, apart from cheering on your mad pals, is to look out for the pantomime horses and so on, and they don't allow them at the Olympics. And, though I know people who have £750 tickets for the London 100-metres final and are very excited...well, I hope they don't sneeze at the wrong moment.

A sport also has to be satisfying to play. After he won his fourth Olympic gold in 1996, the rower Steve Redgrave famously told people to shoot him if he was seen in a boat again, before relenting and winning No. 5 four years later. But in such a demanding sport, the important thing is not the taking part, it's the winning. And the Henley Regatta is the only major sporting occasion I know where no one watches.

Anyone for tennis? Spencer Gore, the first Wimbledon champion in 1877, said that the game would never appeal for long to a decent cricketer: "the monotony of the game would choke him off before he had time to excel in it". That's still true. Even the Williams sisters get bored.

We can also rule out anything where the aim is to hurt your opponent (bye bye, boxing) or where overwhelming excellence is confined to freakish specimens (bye bye, basketball).

There is to me one overriding consideration. The best sport would have to combine outward simplicity with inner profundity, enough to obsess intelligent humans for a lifetime without them ever entirely mastering its strategies and truths.

There is horse racing, for sure: no one has ever fathomed what a horse is thinking. But the world's best trainer and jockey can't turn a nag into a champ. And the interest is largely dependent on the stimulus of a bet. So that leaves two possibles. One is the world's most popular sport. Football is accessible, exciting and profound enough to keep engaging Sir Alex Ferguson past his 70th birthday while still leaving him regularly flummoxed. Unfortunately, it fails the same test as boxing: it damages the brain. Observe Fergie himself on a bad day. Above all, look at the supporters – and the inane delight of the Manchester City and Chelsea fans at their recent triumphs, bought for them by their plutocratic owners.

We have one last contender. Simple in outline; beguiling, indeed addictive to play; thrilling, at crucial moments, to watch; about beating oneself as much as one's opponent. Ask Tiger Woods: no man can ever say he has got golf licked.

However, look at the golf writers, whose idea of a day off is to go out and play the game themselves. Look at the old pros so befuddled that they can no longer trust themselves to propel the ball into the hole with a normal putter. Far more assuredly than boxing, this sport causes brain damage.

Maybe in the end there is no best sport. If underwater hockey or reverse cricket or Greco-Roman wrestling rocks your boat...that's all for the best.

IT'S FOOTBALL
by Patrick Barclay

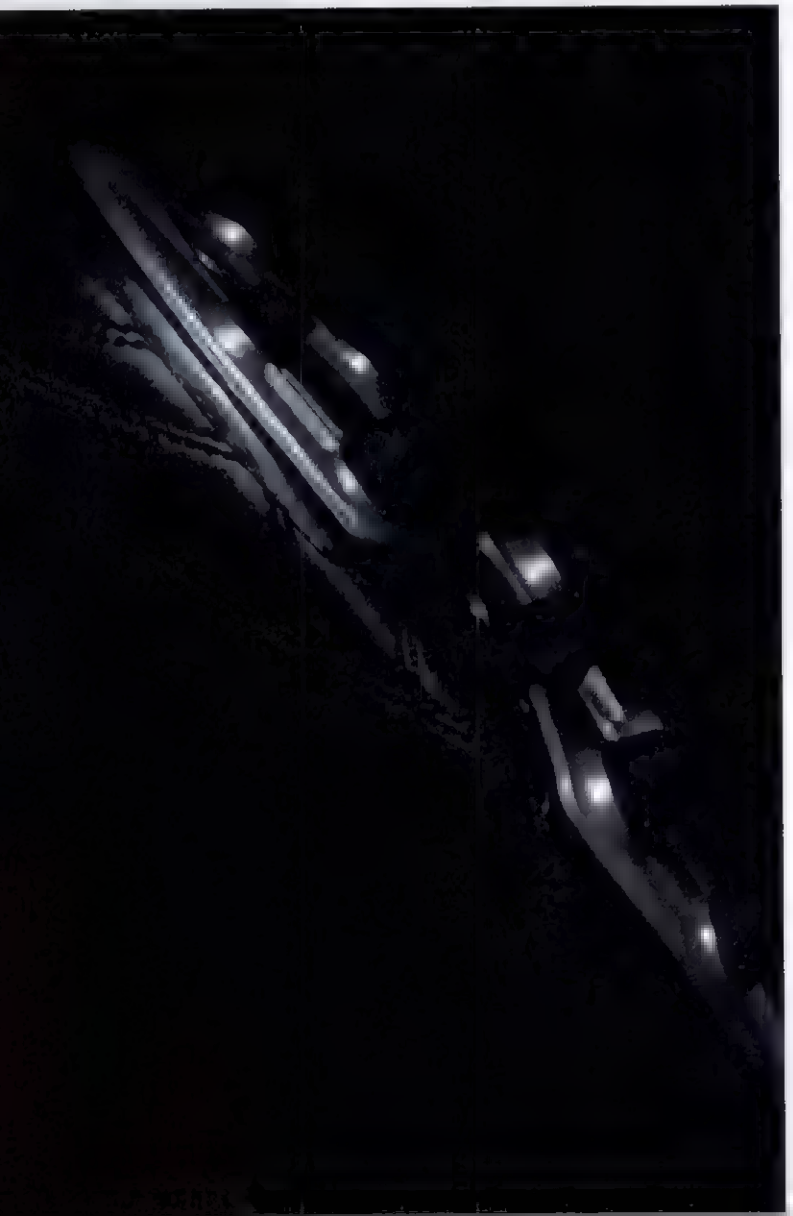
Football – aka soccer – began to benefit from organisation in 1863, when a man named Ebenezer Morley collated rules in his home overlooking the stretch of the Thames on which the Boat Race between Oxford and Cambridge was already an annual fixture. The game took the best part of a century to conquer the world, and then along came satellite television, which has extended football's rule to almost every corner while increasing its intensity. The World Cup is said to engage more people than the Olympic Games or any other event. If you walk into a village in Africa, you will see a child in a Barcelona or Real Madrid shirt.

Football is universal in every way. Unlike basketball or weightlifting, it can be played to a high standard by people of every shape and size. It appeals to both sexes (notably in the United States) and does not rely, like golf or tennis or eques-

trianism or most other sports, on pricey equipment or particular terrain. A scrap of wasteland and a ball fashioned from rags will do; with these basics, any child can aspire to the artistry of Lionel Messi. This is not romantic twaddle but the actual origin of some great players of the past, including the supreme figure of Pelé.

If boxing, say, can rival football for simplicity, football has the obvious superiority of not being essentially violent. Its beauty is summed up by a small man evading, even mastering, those who would try to impose their cynical power on him. If you watch sequences of Diego Maradona in action (search for "Diego Maradona Ultimate Best of – Part 1" and be patient), you see the ultimate victory of skill over force.

Though meritocratic, football can be very cruel because scoring is low and margins narrow. Google "Champions League final 1999" and share the explosive joy of 50,000 people as their team – which has played poorly and is losing deservedly after 90 minutes (Manchester United) – scores twice in the short time allowed for stoppages to overcome a team that has played well (Bayern Munich). One of United's players, Gary Neville, found the *mot juste*: "supernatural". Note the Bayern players. Several are prone, lifeless, as if downed by arrows of fate. One of the most experienced, Stefan Effenberg, was reluctant even to talk about it five years later.



Being the fairest and unfairest of all games helps to make football the most morally interesting. It does not make it the most admirable, and the passions it has unleashed have led to, among other tragedies, the crushing to death of 39 supporters before the European Cup final between Liverpool and Juventus in 1985. That the greatest game, like most great civilisations, has blood on its hands may diminish its pride, but not its scale and scope. It is the game that has everything.

IT'S ATHLETICS
by Tanya Aldred

Faster, higher, stronger: sport doesn't get any simpler. It is an inbuilt human instinct, a race we have been part of since we clocked as chubby-legged babies that it was possible to move from one side of the room to the other without being carried. Think back to primary school: the innocent six-year-old understands her place in the hierarchy very well. She knows who is tallest, who is cleverest, and, above all, who is quickest. In that desperate race from one side of the playground to the other, there is no hiding in the shadows. There is only one winner.

And there in a nutshell is the appeal of athletics. It is a body against a body, a mind against a mind. It is unashamedly elitist, cruel and selfish, but I love it. I love the extraordinary bodies: the will-o'-the-wisp 10,000-metre runners, the stonkingly huge sprinters, the beautiful, doe-legged female high jumpers. Each a mark of human progress – a freak of genetics honed by endless training and the right sort of carbs.

And I love the social mix: no rich boys' club this. It brings pride to the otherwise unexceptional, and here I speak from the heart. I was a skinny 12-year-old with NHS glasses, plaits, a Radio 4 addiction and a briefcase. Then, from nowhere, one PE lesson, I won the 1,500 metres. Truly, a different world opened up.

The track trumps the field events, though they have their own quiet appeal. Long jump is thrilling, with the poignancy of that plasticine by the take-off board and the impossibility of travelling so far in the air; javelin heroic, in a spear-carrying, hunter-gatherer way.

And then the running...the blue riband depends on whether you value power or endurance, nerve, cunning or batons. The marathon is profoundly, deeply moving to run or watch, but most prefer the 100 metres – a preening, posturing, gamble of a race, but there is no arguing with the fastest man on earth. Though it was a little disappointing when my small son and I looked up the animal 100 metres and discovered that Usain Bolt would finish only 28th, just ahead of an elephant.

The downsides are the corporate carnage that surrounds the Olympics, which athletics spearheads, and doping. Since the dirtiest race in history at Seoul in 1988, everyone is doubted. It's no fun watching drugged-up humans: you might as well go into town on a Saturday night. But without proof, we must believe. And if we believe, athletics is a joy. >

> IT'S CRICKET
by Sambit Bal

Very few things, certainly no other sport, can engage the senses like Test cricket, the subtlest, most poetic, most varied and intellectual of spectator sports. Harold Pinter memorably described it as "the greatest thing God created on earth – certainly greater than sex", and I know what he meant. To those who get it, cricket counts among life's highest pleasures.

The beauty of a Test match is that it can be enjoyed in several ways: in its majestic fullness, over five long days; in a short session; in a duel between batsman and bowler; or in the action of a second. The experience is unlike any other, at once meditative and exhilarating.

On one level, cricket is a grand, winding narrative that runs languidly enough for the souls of players to be bared, but making so many startling turns that nothing can ever be taken for granted. On another, it is a game of moments, each invested with match-altering potential. The central action, the delivery of the ball by the bowler and the batsman's response to it, lasts only a second or two, and for the batsman every ball is a matter of life and death. Because the game goes to the edge hundreds of times a day, the anticipation, between balls, between overs, between sessions and between days, creates a unique pleasure. "Each thing that happens", Pinter said, "is dramatic."

Cricket has all the best attributes of sport, as well as some of the worst – the scope for cheating and fixing, the occasional longueur. It contains multiple skills and styles. For sensory appeal, watching Shane Warne bowl (search on YouTube for "best wicket in cricket history") or Brian Lara bat ("Lara's batting style") is a feast by itself, but watching them take on each other ("Lara vs Warne") is a joy without parallel. All wrists, all poetry, and each deploying a distinct craft. Baseball is the only other game where two such different skills clash, and cricket, by allowing the ball to hit the surface before it reaches the batsman, by letting the elements – sun, clouds, dust, wind – play a part, and by making scoring possible all around the ground, finds room for variations that baseball can only dream of.

It calls for light feet and deft hands. There's balance, poise and grace when Sachin Tendulkar, an all-time great still playing today, caresses a boundary: speed, ferocity and athleticism when a fast bowler like Dale Steyn is in full flight. It demands lightning reflexes and saintly patience. It can be both subtle and brutal. And it is the only sport where a stalemate can be heart-stoppingly thrilling.

And then it has something possessed by only one other game, chess, which has none of the adrenalin. Cricket calls for so many decisions that it is a game of the mind as much as of the body: just ask Mike Brearley, who was a philosopher before he became England captain and has been a psychotherapist since. All games reveal character, but cricket reveals so much that it has long since been a study of life. How can any other sport compete?

IT'S EQUESTRIANISM
by Samantha Weinberg

It starts with a ballet on horseback: rider and horse as one, performing a dressage test of such elegance, beauty and precision as to put ice dancers to shame. It moves on to the cross-country phase in which the team – for horse and rider are a team in themselves, within the national team they may represent – hurtles over sturdy fences, made of timber, brush or stone, into water and over ditches. It requires a special combination of strength, athleticism, bravery and trust – horse in rider, rider in horse – to leap over a solid four-foot wall with a blind drop on the landing side. And it culminates in show-jumping. In a crowd-filled stadium, the pair negotiate a course of coloured jumps; one tiny mistake, a mis-flick of a hoof on a pole four foot high, and the efforts of the previous days are undone.

The whole three-day event is a triathlon requiring mental strength as well as physical, psychology as well as physiology. Last year, the New Zealand rider Mark Todd won his fourth Badminton Horse Trials (said to be the second-largest paid-entry sporting event in the world – after the Indianapolis 500). He was 55: not something the 53-year-old decathlete Daley Thompson could hope to replicate. This is a

sport in which experience talks. Over years of training, horse and rider build a bond that sustains and protects them in situations that may well be life-threatening. The relationship celebrates the role that horses have played in human life across the millennia, in transport, agriculture and warfare. Pheidippides would not have collapsed on reaching Athens if he had had the benefit of four strong legs beneath him; Richard III might not have been killed had his cries for a horse been answered.

Equestrianism is not going to win medals for inclusivity: it takes deep pockets and many Barbours to train and maintain a string of eventers, and in not many arenas has the royal family produced a European gold-medallist (Princess Anne on Doublet, 1971) and a world champion (her daughter Zara Phillips on Toytown, 2006). But what other discipline involves such a testing combination of skill and stamina? In which other Olympic sport do the male and female of the species (and that's the horses as well as their riders) compete on equal terms? Where else in London this summer will any animals, let alone these magnificent, shining, snorting beasts, appear as competitors?

The answer to all these questions is none and nowhere. It surely follows: equestrianism is the greatest sport.

PROP STYLIST CAROLE GHISLAINE S.MONS /POST PRODUCTION ZOE TAN GERLICZK

IT'S BASEBALL
by Dan Rosenheck

Much of the appeal of sport lies in pushing the limits of our physical capability. Disciplines like track and field or weightlifting isolate specific skills, whereas complex team sports require a broader mix of athletic gifts. But they both make the spectator who could never hope to run so fast or leap so high marvel at what other members of the same species can achieve.

The allure of baseball is precisely the opposite. It encapsulates the bulk of life's experiences rather than showcasing the extremes. Strength and speed come in handy, to be sure. But they are modest advantages rather than essentials, making the game supremely egalitarian. If you are male, no matter what you look like, there has been a star baseball player who looks like you, from 140lb "Wee" Willie Keeler to the gluttonous Babe Ruth. All it takes is a little hand-eye co-ordination and a heck of a lot of practice.

Most other professional sports consist of a series of high-profile signature events spaced out anywhere from every few days to every few months. But baseball's regular season reflects the daily grind of a modern routine: it runs to 162 games. Baseball's finest hitters fail to reach base six times out of ten, and its fielders are pilloried if they make an error even 3% of the time. Unlike most team sports, it is broken up into discrete individual actions – no teammate can help you throw, hit or catch the ball. It was said that the famous hitter Ted Williams personified late-season games "when the only thing at stake is the tissue-thin difference between a thing done well and a thing done ill. Baseball is a game of the long season, of relentless and gradual averaging-out. Irrelevance...always threatens its interest, which can be maintained [only] by players who always care...about themselves and their art." That was John Updike: baseball is subtle and interesting enough to attract some great writing.

All that egalitarianism, and then come the three short play-off series in October, which can negate a whole year's work in a fraction of a second: a compelling allegory for life's fundamental unfairness. For all his prolific accomplishments, Williams never won a World Series, and failed to deliver in many of his club's most crucial contests.

As a uniquely quantifiable sport with statistics going back more than a century, baseball places modern society in the context of history. Rather than the steady march of progress in, say, 100-metre times, baseball is forever putting us in our place, reminding us that most of today's finest players are not as dominant as those of the 1910s or 1920s.

Other sports may reflect our hopes and dreams. But only baseball shows how far we need to go to achieve them. ■

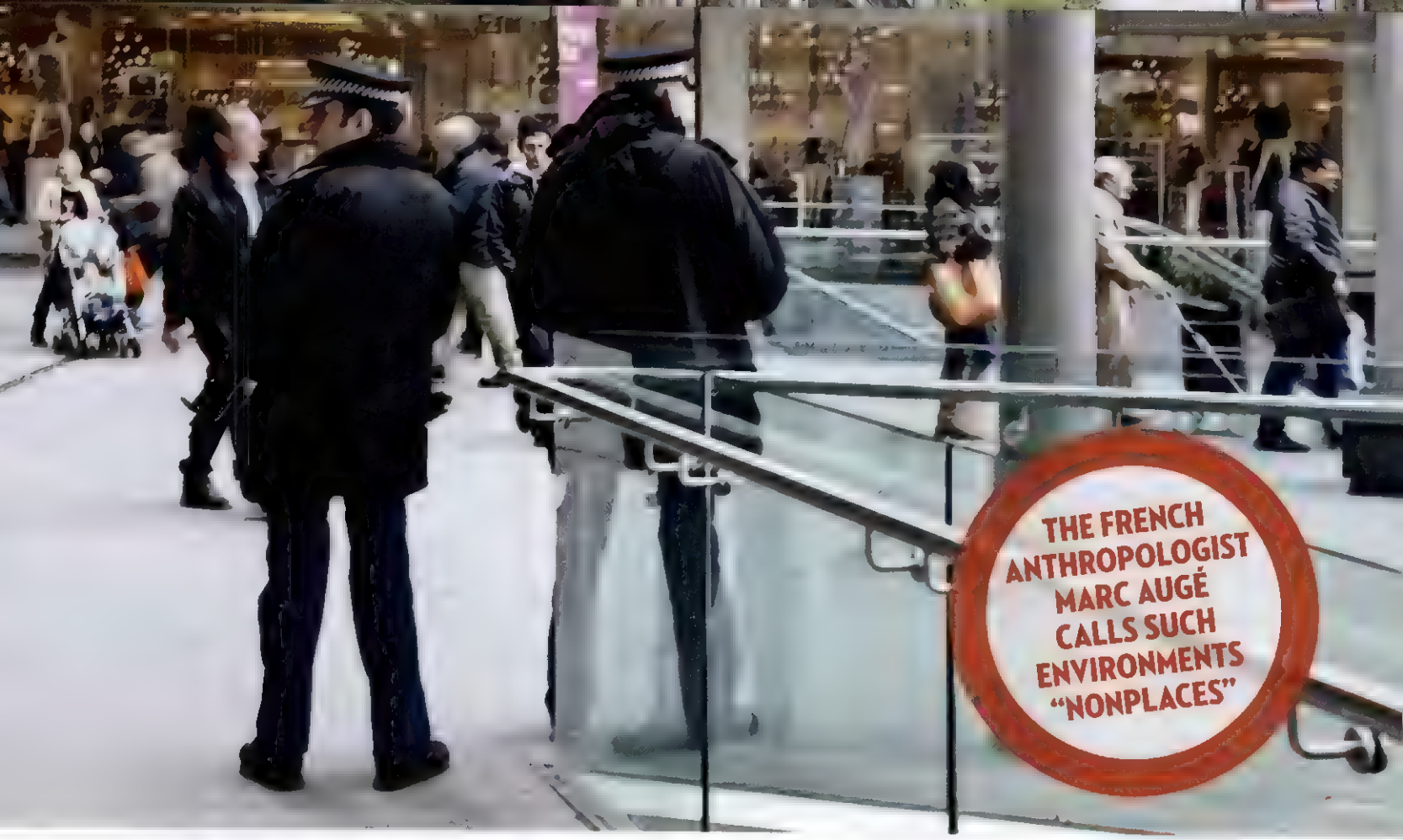
HAVE YOUR SAY

A TWIST IN THE TALE

FROM SLUMS TO SOCIAL EXPERIMENTS AND WAVES OF IMMIGRATION, THE EAST END HAS SEEN IT ALL. NOW IT HAS THE OLYMPICS, A BUILDING BOOM AND EUROPE'S BIGGEST SHOPPING CENTRE. WE SENT THE NOVELIST AND FORMER EAST-ENDER **HARI KUNZRU** BACK TO SEE WHAT HAS BECOME OF HIS OLD HAUNTS

A whole new landscape Stratford, 2012: the Westfield mall, Olympic stadia, the Orbit and a view of central London skyline including the

OF EAST LONDON



Strong arm of the law
ABOVE Armed police at Westfield Stratford City
RIGHT Separating old from new on the Greenway

> include Croydon and Southwark), a southern or eastern hub to supplement Westminster and the City of London.

Stratford used to be a place that made you feel as if you'd found yourself marooned on a traffic island. Now the new plaza has a dramatic footbridge leading to the promised land – of shopping. Westfield Stratford City is, by floor area, the largest urban mall in the European Union, 300 retail units (formerly known as shops) and 70 restaurants, anchored by a 22,000-square-metre department store, a casino, three hotels and a 17-screen cinema. Visitors to the Olympics will be funnelled through this retail space like travellers in an airport terminal. They will pass a Mini Cooper hung precariously on a wall (painted, of course, in Union Jack livery), a branch of Prada and an outlet for the rock star Liam Gallagher's range of Mod-inspired clothing. Underfoot, there is reportedly a trial of an innovative floor tile, Pavegen, which harnesses the kinetic energy of foot traffic to generate electricity.

I wandered around one weekday morning, past the Tossed salad bar, the Apple store, stands offering massage, Swarovski crystals, "Keep Calm and Carry On" phone covers. Black-clad security guards roamed about with earpieces and that look, simultaneously phlegmatic and suspicious, that club doormen get when you tell them your name is on the door. At a temporary cosmetics stand, in front of a picture of Emma Watson, star of that great projection of British soft power, "Harry Potter", I spoke to Lucy, who was offering makeovers. She said she was excited by the Olympics but nervous of the crowds. She had asked to be posted somewhere quieter while the games were on. I looked down from a balcony to see a mysterious, highly decorated structure, which a sign proclaimed as a "Future Fashion Mocktail Lounge". It seemed like a perfect executive summary.

In a 2010 report into retail diversity, the New Economics Foundation found that 41% of British towns had become what it called "Clone Towns", in which more than half the shops were part of chains. It found east London considerably more diverse than the west, with Shoreditch and Stoke Newington doing better on this score than anywhere else in the inner city. In west London, "only Shepherd's Bush registered as a home town [the survey's term for diverse neighbourhoods]...How long this status can be maintained remains to be seen with the opening of the largest urban-area indoor shopping centre in Europe – 'Westfield London' – right next door."

The Westfield mall in Stratford, a mirror of its sister in Shepherd's Bush, is clearly nicer than the tangle it replaced. It is bright, airy, well-designed. The curve of the main gallery could even be called beautiful. It is, however, not a genuine public space: the people of Stratford have no right to be there if they're not shopping, and can be kicked out at the whim of the management. It could exist anywhere in Britain, or with a few tweaks, anywhere in the world from Kuala Lumpur to Dubai. The French anthropologist Marc Augé calls such environments "nonplaces". They abound in our globalised world –

airports, motorway service stations, hotel chains – sites which are both utopian, pointing towards a planned, functional future, and dystopian – thin and transient, with nothing local about them, nothing to inspire the formation of a community. The typical east-London streetscape of pound shops and groceries may be unaesthetic, but it represents interwoven circuits of production and consumption that are local and targeted at the people who are already here, instead of those developers would like to see coming, people with more disposable income and fewer social problems, who will eat tapas while wearing La Perla underwear and playing with their new phones.

THE SUSPICION THAT the East End is to be the site of an experiment in social cleansing gets to the heart of why some east Londoners are violently opposed to the Olympics. It's the reason why ominous slogans like "Death to the Gods of Mount Olympus" have been flyposted on the blue fence around the Olympic site. From the Greenway, an elevated footpath built over the huge pipe of the Northern Outfall sewer, the skyline is dominated by the ArcelorMittal Orbit, a vast steel structure designed by the Turner prize-winning sculptor Anish Kapoor. If the Eiffel Tower developed chronic shyness, blushed and squirmed itself in a knot, this is how it would look. The Orbit's introverted red squiggle seems an appropriate symbol for a games which is producing a pervasive sense of trepidation. Conceived in a boom and constructed in a deep recession, the crown-like ring of the stadium and the sinuous curves of Zaha Hadid's aquatics centre seem impressive but also threatening, if you know what they represent to some of the people huddled in their shadow.

The Conservative-led coalition government recently announced that it would be capping Local Housing Allowance (LHA), a move which will mean that many claimants, particularly those with large families, will no longer be able to afford to live in London. In the spring, Newham council had around 32,000 people in urgent need of housing, and had announced, controversially, that it was seeking to move some of them to other parts of Britain. The maximum available LHA benefit for a four-bedroom property in Newham is around £400 a week. When the *Guardian* looked into this, it found precisely 339 such properties available within a five-mile radius of the borough, and not all of those would be available to benefit claimants. Rents are rising as the market responds to the Olympic facelift, which will only exacerbate the shortage. So, though the Olympics will undoubtedly regenerate the physical fabric of the area, it is obvious that not all of its current residents will be around to reap the benefits. The poorest will be shunted out.

For east Londoners who are not at the bottom of the heap, the Olympics offer a mixture of risks and opportunities. This can be seen on the other side of the Olympic Park from Stratford, at Hackney Wick. It is a landscape whose contours were defined by the Victorians. Near the junction of the Hertford Canal and Lee Navigation, you can hear traffic thundering towards the Blackwall tunnel, and as you cross the footbridge into the half-forgotten haven of Fish Island, you can see the red tower of the Bryant & May match factory, scene >

What goes up...
ABOVE Canal-side art at Hackney Wick; the figures are less than a foot high
RIGHT The post-war Carpenters Estate; much of it is marked for demolition

> of a formative moment in the history of the labour movement – in the 1880s the so-called Match Girls went on a successful strike in protest at having to work 14-hour days and handle white phosphorus. Now, the canals are lined by developments of buy-to-let apartments and the old factory is a gated community, where, for the duration of the Olympics, surface-to-air missiles have been sited, in case of terrorist attack.

The Wick used to be an industrial centre. The world's first true synthetic plastic, parkesine, was manufactured here. Other industries included shellac and aniline dyes. It's also the site of the former Eton Mission, where from 1913 to 1967 the famous public school ran a church and a football league – a previous attempt to better the lives of east Londoners through sport. Many of the old factory buildings have become artists' studios, some of them used by friends of mine who were in Shoreditch and Whitechapel in the 1990s, before space got too expensive. Tower Hamlets council says the area has "potential for major regeneration". Everybody seems aware the Olympics will change the place beyond recognition. I found two Polish builders, Tomasz and Bogdan, unloading scaffolding poles in a yard with an uninterrupted view of the stadium. "Maybe we run parking, make good money. But maybe all the roads are closed. We don't know."

Next door is a fish smokery, H. Forman & Son, whose factory was relocated from the Olympic site. It's hoping to cash in on its large car park by creating something called the Fish Island Riviera, comprising 30 corporate hospitality suites, for rent (from £75,000 + VAT) for the duration of the games. Its managing director, Lance Forman, told the *Evening Standard*, which ran artists' impressions of palm trees and a lecherous-looking businessman watching women's beach volleyball, "Fish Island will be the VIP side of the games...We expect athletes to come here to celebrate their medals."

At Stour Space, a studio complex which is also advertising itself as a venue to rent for the Olympics, I sat on a café terrace overlooking the canal and ordered a cappuccino – not so much a drink as a coffee-flavoured symbol of gentrification. At the next table were two locals reminiscing about the old Hackney Wick stadium, once a track for dog racing and speedway, later a derelict site which hosted a crazed, informal market where you could buy almost anything under the sun, if you were happy not to ask too many questions. Stephen grew up in the area; Richard teaches in a local school. They used to run a gallery in Shoreditch and have been friends for years. Both wondered aloud whether the money brought into the area by the Olympics will really trickle down to the local people, or whether regeneration will just turn this quiet canalside into a place for the people who have already wrought such change on the area: what Stephen called "the middle-class immigrants".

TO UNDERSTAND THE scepticism about the Olympic legacy, it is important to know about the failure of past planning experiments in east London, symbolised for many by the high-rise social housing that was built in the post-war period. After the Luftwaffe's

carpet-bombing cleared much of the Victorian street grid, a social-democratic notion of a rationally planned society took hold of the governing classes. Tower blocks that were supposed to be utopian "streets in the sky" quickly became containment areas for the toxic poor, dangerous and depressing places that made people nostalgic for the low-quality but human-scale housing they replaced.

Some blocks have been belatedly recognised as signature modern buildings (Denys Lasdun's Keeling House, in Bethnal Green, has been sold to a private developer and is now a "luxury" apartment block), but many more have been demolished, after only 20 or 30 years of service. In 1968, a brand new 22-storey block in Newham called Ronan Point suffered a partial collapse when a gas explosion demolished a load-bearing wall, sending one corner of the building crashing to the ground, killing four people and injuring 17. It had been built using a cheap technique called "large-panel system building", which was aggressively promoted to cash-strapped local councils across Britain by a corrupt cabal of builders, architects and planners. The collapse put a stop to new high-rise social housing in Britain for a generation. Only recently, with developments like the Shard, rearing up ominously near London Bridge, has the idea of high-rise living caught on again. These days, it's for the rich. Social housing is usually built closer to street level.

On the south-eastern fringe of the Olympic site is the Carpenters Estate, a typical post-war development, with some low-rise housing built around three tall towers. It is an eerie place. Most of the residents have been "decanted", as the current planning jargon has it, and in April the council was trying to decide whether to demolish or refurbish it. Tenants who used to have secure tenancies, with the right to pass them on to their children, will now be offered less favourable terms, in most cases from housing agencies, which will expose them to the rapid upward trend of the post-Olympic property market.

One rumour is that the Carpenters site will become a second campus for University College London. During the Olympics the top floors of the towers will be used as one of the media centres. When I visited, the only sign of life was the Irish pub in the centre, where a few regulars were having a lunchtime pint. On the bar a stack of copies of a news-sheet called the *East End Howler* detailed a campaign to "save the Carpenters". "It is very quiet," writes one resident, "and it's statistically one of the least crime-ridden estates in the whole of London. There is a bit of a community there and it just seems like the council is wilfully destroying what everyone who lives there thinks is a bit of a haven in order to send us to places that we might not feel as safe in or as settled in. A lot of the older people who live there have been there since the blocks went up."

Throughout east London, a population that has come to terms with (and even, in the case of the Carpenters, learned to love) previous planning upheavals seems braced for the Olympics rather than excited about them. In Hackney, as early as March, residents of at least one estate overlooking the site were experiencing daily security sweeps by anti-terrorist police. In Limehouse, locals who live on one of the VIP traffic routes have been told they can only cross the >

INSTEAD OF CITIZENS, WE ARE NOW TO BE CUSTOMERS, AND OUR RIGHT TO THE CITY IS CONTINGENT ON THE AGREEMENT OF THE PRIVATE OWNERS OF THOSE SPACES

A new page
ABOVE Messages of protest tied to the fence at a proposed basketball-training facility on Leyton marshes

> road at designated spots, under the supervision of marshals. Everywhere I get a sense of increased discipline and control. This, of course, is part and parcel of any good planner's drive to efficiency. East London has been unruly for too long. If it is going to pay its way, it needs to stop drinking at lunchtime and get to work. East London has been hearing this for at least 200 years.

On Leyton marshes, ingrained distrust of authority has erupted into outright dissent as protesters have occupied the site of a proposed basketball-practice facility. They claim the council offered the land to the Olympic Delivery Authority without proper legal consultation and suspect that the temporary structure will in fact prove permanent, like the ice rink next door. What was once common land, popular with dog-walkers, bird-watchers and other non-shoppers, risks being enclosed. Charlie, one of the protesters, believes the powers that be are manipulating the Olympic euphoria to clamp down on individual liberty. "While we were blinded by the light," he says, "they introduced new laws, new ways of dispossessing us."

The contemporary trend for public space to be privatised (instead of the old high street, the mall) has consequences, exemplified by the behaviour of the security guards around the Olympic site, who harass photographers and move bystanders along with a casual authoritarianism that would have been unthinkable before the rise of the post-September 11th 2001 security state. These new enclosures may, in their way, be as significant as their 18th-century precursors. Instead of citizens, we are now to be customers, and our right to the city is contingent on the agreement of the private owners of those spaces. It's not a position that brings with it a sense of personal security. It's a telling contrast to the industrial optimism of the Victorians, and the Modernist aspiration of the streets in the sky. It seems like an unconscious acknowledgment that off as well as on the field, London 2012 will produce losers as well as winners. A few months ago Britain's poet laureate, Carol Ann Duffy, wrote a poem in memory of the sporting club of the old Eton Mission, which has been set in bronze letters into a wall of what is now one of the Paralympic venues. It reads, in part:

> This is legacy –
> young lives respected, cherished, valued, helped
> to sprint, swim, bowl, box, play, excel, belong;
> believe community is self in multitude –
> the way the past still dedicates to us
> its distant, present light

These lines have, for me, a rather half-baked optimism, as if the poet is throwing positive words at the Olympics in the hope that one or two of them will stick. The past of the East End is not dedicating much of its light to these games. London 2012 is all about the shiny, productive future. The Olympic legacy will be the transformation of the built environment, and an influx of new money and people. There is little to suggest that respect and belonging will be part of the package for those who don't have the money to play. ■

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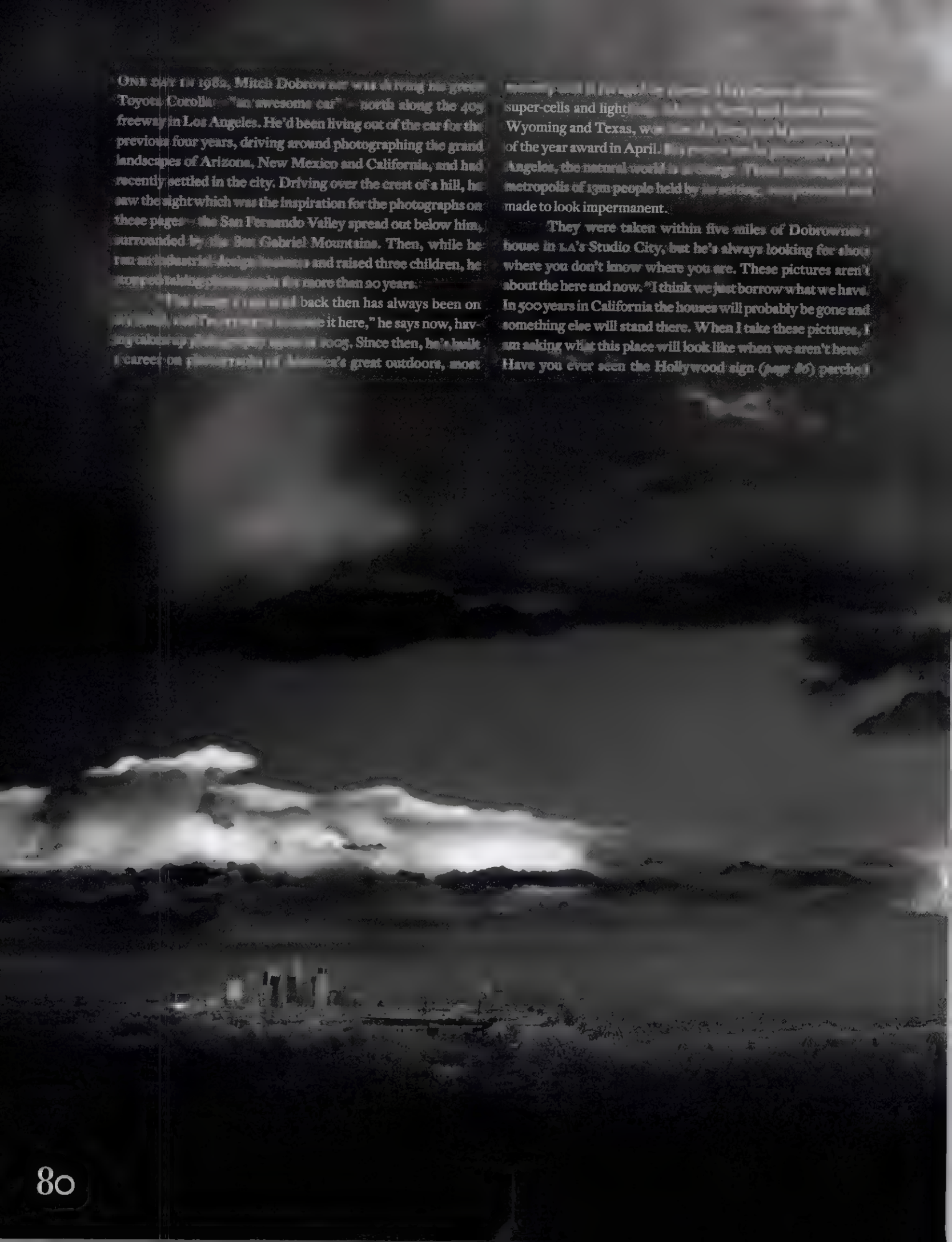
Big and small

Show **Mitch Dobrowner** a sprawling city and he will find a way of dwarfing it, simply by placing it in its natural context. In this photo essay, he captures Los Angeles

"What I see in the photographs are these beautiful landscapes," says Dobrowner, who shot this Los Angeles cloudscape in 2010. "And I see what mankind has built over them – these rolling buildings. I see the gulf between the landscapes and what we've done to them."



ONE DAY IN 1982, Mitch Dobrowner was driving his green Toyota Corolla – "an awesome car" – north along the 405 freeway in Los Angeles. He'd been living out of the car for the previous four years, driving around photographing the grand landscapes of Arizona, New Mexico and California, and had recently settled in the city. Driving over the crest of a hill, he saw the sight which was the inspiration for the photographs on these pages – the San Fernando Valley spread out below him, surrounded by the San Gabriel Mountains. Then, while he ran an industrial design business and raised three children, he kept photographing [illegible] for more than 20 years.

"The desire I had back then has always been on [illegible] it here," he says now, having taken up photography again in 2003. Since then, he's built a career on [illegible]'s great outdoors, most [illegible] super-cells and light[illegible] Wyoming and Texas, [illegible] of the year award in April. [illegible] Angeles, the natural world is a [illegible] metropolis of 13m people held by [illegible] made to look impermanent.

They were taken within five miles of Dobrowner's house in LA's Studio City, but he's always looking for shots where you don't know where you are. These pictures aren't about the here and now. "I think we just borrow what we have. In 500 years in California the houses will probably be gone and something else will stand there. When I take these pictures, I am asking what this place will look like when we aren't here." Have you ever seen the Hollywood sign (*page 86*) parched

Eye on the skies
"There's nothing more beautiful to me",
Mitch Dobrowner says,
"than Los Angeles after a rain storm"

Making a molehill out of a city
The San Fernando Valley Generating Station is dwarfed by the San Gabriel Mountains behind it. When Dobrowner began showing these pictures to friends, they barely noticed that there were buildings in them

Right place, right time
Dobrowner came across this winter storm in the Black Rock Hills in Utah in 2010. "I like to let nature do its thing," he says. "I just try to position myself."

The scheme of things
The Hollywood Hills, captured in 2007. "The landscapes don't shift that much, but everything we've built is rising and falling, rising and falling. The pictures put into perspective for me that we're standing on a rock spinning through space"

GOOD TIMES, BAD TIMES

Newspapers are in crisis – yet they have greater reach than ever before. And nowhere is this truer than at the Guardian, the paper that revealed the Murdoch phone-hacking scandal. **Tim de Lisle** follows its triumphs and tribulations, and asks its editor how it can survive

guardian
theguardian

It was a bright warm day in March, and one of the world's leading newspapers was doing something radical: meeting its readers. The *Guardian* was holding the first festival in its 191-year history, billed as the *Guardian* Open Weekend. It opened the doors of its offices, at the King's Place arts centre behind King's Cross station in London, and offered passes for £30 or £40 a day or £60 for the weekend (one child free with every adult). Around 5,000 readers poured in. Among them was a Baptist minister in his mid-80s who had taken the paper, religiously, for 66 years.

The speakers included painters, politicians, physicists, rock stars, novelists, explorers, actors, footballers and philosophers. There were 188 events, and still the queues were long. You could take a boat trip on the canal, commission a T-shirt from a graffiti artist, eat mackerel and chips "curated" by a local chef, or browse second-hand books on a barge. You could observe the *Guardian* reader, and see how this semi-mythical figure now comes in two broad types – the over-60s, in linen jackets or sensible cardies, looking like retired teachers or psychotherapists, and the under-35s, in denim or leather, harder to pin a profession on. You could see the *Guardian*'s editor-in-chief, Alan Rusbridger, chatting to readers, tall and mop-haired with a satchel over his shoulder, simultaneously boyish and avuncular. You could listen to folk bands playing and poets reading from their work, and watch a blank white wall slowly turn into a giant mural, a Bayeux tapestry of vivid vignettes from the weekend captured by a team of illustrators. Among them was a cuddly, felt-tipped version of the artist

Both boyish and avuncular
Alan Rusbridger, editor of the Guardian since 1995 and now a firm believer in "open journalism"

Grayson Perry, in his transvestite mode, with a speech bubble. "Bite the hand that feeds," it said, "but not too hard."

The atmosphere was stimulating and fiercely polite. The *Guardian* is easy to mock for its sandal-wearing earnestness, its champagne socialism and congenital weakness for typos, but its readers en masse seemed like the kind any editor would be glad to have: curious, questioning, quick to laugh. Seeing the rapport between them and their paper, feeling its pull for the powerful and the talented, enjoying this brand-new festival that felt as if it had been going for years, you could easily have assumed that everything in the *Guardian* was rosy.

IN MANY WAYS, it is. With its journalism, the *Guardian* has been having an astonishing run. For 20 years or more, ever since a bold reinvention led by Rusbridger's predecessor Peter Preston in 1988, it has been the most stylish paper in the hyper-competitive British quality pack, the wittiest and best-designed, the strongest for features, the one most likely to reflect modern life. But it ruled only at what journalists call the soft end. In the 1970s, the age of Woodward and Bernstein, the *Guardian*'s best-remembered story was an April fool from 1977, which dreamt up the Pacific nation of San Serriffe – beautifully done but disclosing nothing more than its own sardonic wit. In the 1990s, the *Guardian* began to land some scoops, notably the scandals that brought down two Tory MPs, Jonathan Aitken and Neil Hamilton. But it still wasn't known for big investigations, the kind of stories that demand courage, persistence and resources. This is where its culture has changed. It ran a sustained investigation into illicit payments by the arms giant BAE – first alleged in 2003, finally admitted in 2010, and now the subject of nine-figure compensation settlements. It did well with the Wikileaks diplomatic cables, and the English riots of 2011 and their causes.

Above all, it has led the way in the News International phone-hacking scandal, a farrago of power, corruption and lies, exposed by Nick Davies and other *Guardian* reporters. For two years, their investigation was lonely and scoffed at. A police chief urged Rusbridger to drop it; the mayor of London, Boris Johnson, who presides over the Metropolitan Police, called it "codswallop". Then, last July, came the *Guardian*'s disclosure that the targets included the murdered teenager Milly Dowler. The story erupted across all the media. It has now led to the closure of the *News of the World*, the humbling of Rupert Murdoch, the fall of his son James, the arrest of his favourite Rebekah Brooks, multiple resignations by senior policemen and media executives, at least 50 more arrests, and six official investigations – three criminal ones, employing 150 police officers; one by a House of Commons select committee, one by the communications regulator Ofcom, and, most theatrically, the Leveson inquiry into the regulation of the media, which has spent months shining a fitful light on the mucky machinations of power. By the end of May, when it emerged that the Conservative-led coalition had allowed a former Murdoch editor to work at 10 Downing Street without the normal security vetting, the trail of dirt led all the way to David Cameron's desk.

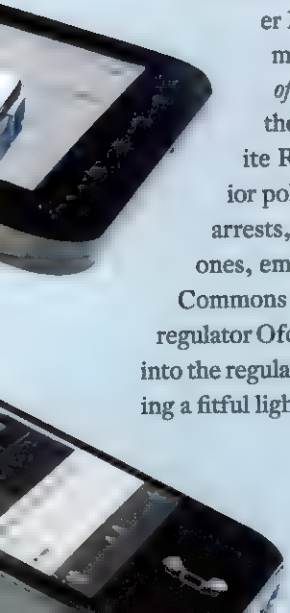
The hacking saga has shown journalism at its worst, invading the privacy of a murdered schoolgirl and her family, but also at its best, exposing a web of illegal activity that the police had missed, and speaking truth to power at a time when Rebekah Brooks, for one, was busy kissing it on both cheeks.

The *Guardian*'s reporting has not been faultless – it had to retract the claim that *News of the World* reporters had deleted voicemails on Milly Dowler's phone, which caused an extra layer of public revulsion. But this will still go down as one of the great investigations. As Watergate is to the *Washington Post*, and thalidomide to the *Sunday Times*, so phone-hacking will surely be to the *Guardian*: a defining moment in its history. In March, Rusbridger went to Harvard to receive the Goldsmith Career Award from the Joan Shorenstein Centre, one of the highest honours in American journalism. He was the first non-American to win it. "V happy to be in harvard for a career award," he told his 70,000 Twitter followers. "Like reading nice obit without going to trouble of dying."

THE GUARDIAN SPOKE TRUTH TO POWER AT A TIME WHEN REBEKAH BROOKS, FOR ONE, WAS BUSY KISSING IT ON BOTH CHEEKS

This triumph of old-school reporting has been accompanied by spectacular success in new media. The *Guardian* has never been a big-selling newspaper: among the 11 national dailies in Britain, it lies 10th, with only the *Independent* behind it. But on the internet, the *Guardian* lies second among British newspaper sites (behind the *Mail*, which cheerfully chases hits by aiming lower than its print sister) and in the top five in the world, rubbing shoulders with the *New York Times*. Where many newspapers treated the web with suspicion, the *Guardian* dived in, starting early (1995), experimenting widely, pioneering live-blogging, embracing citizen journalism, mastering slideshows and timelines and interactive graphics. By March 2012 it was putting up 400 pieces of content every 24 hours. Its network of sites had a daily average of 4m browsers, as many as the sites for Britain's bestselling newspaper (the *Sun*) and its bestselling broadsheet (the *Telegraph*) put together. The *Guardian*'s total traffic, around 67m unique browsers a month, was still rising by 60-70% a year.

A third of those readers are in America, which is an extraordinary achievement for a left-leaning British newspaper with its roots in Manchester. The urge to crack America >



> is a common yearning in British public life, affecting not just rock bands and TV personalities but supermarkets (Tesco, which hasn't succeeded) and prime ministers (Tony Blair, who has). In the news media, only three British institutions apart from the *Mail* have made a big impact in America: the BBC, which was already world-famous before it launched BBC America in 1998; *The Economist* (mothership of this magazine), whose abiding belief in the free market chimes with American values; and now the *Guardian*, which had no such head start. If, 15 years ago, anyone in British newspapers had predicted that the *Guardian* would soon find an audience of 20m in America, they would have been laughed out of the pub.

In terms of reach and impact, the *Guardian* is doing better than ever before. But its success may contain the seeds of its demise. Its print circulation is tumbling. In October 2005, boosted by a change to the medium-sized Berliner format, the average daily circulation was 403,297. By March 2012 it was down to 217,190. Those figures are not quite like-for-like, as

"WE'VE ALL BEEN HIT BY A TIDAL WAVE," HE OBSERVES. BUT HE SAYS IT IN THE TONES OF A MAN WHO HAS RUN INTO A SPOT OF DRIZZLE

the *Guardian* has sworn off the Viagra of giveaway copies and overseas sales (which tend to be counted less rigorously); but they are still bleak. Saturday sales remain sturdy, at 377,000, but, on a typical weekday, only 178,000 people buy the *Guardian*, while millions graze on it for nothing on their screens. In the financial year 2009-10, the national newspapers division of Guardian Media Group – which also includes the *Observer*, Britain's oldest Sunday paper – lost £37m. The following year, it managed to cut costs by £26m, and still ended up losing £38m. In May, Rusbridger told me he was expecting a similar loss for 2011-12. So, for three years running, the *Guardian* has been losing £100,000 a day. This is not boom or bust, but both at once: the best of times, and the worst of times.

At the Open Weekend, one event looked at whether journalism was a second-rate form of writing. In the audience of 50 or so was the white-haired figure of Nick Davies, taking a breather from his investigative duties. When the conversation turned to long-form journalism, he spoke up, sounding exasperated. "In 20 years' time," he said, "there won't be any newspapers left to do this. All these millions of hits won't pay our salaries. The internet is killing journalism."

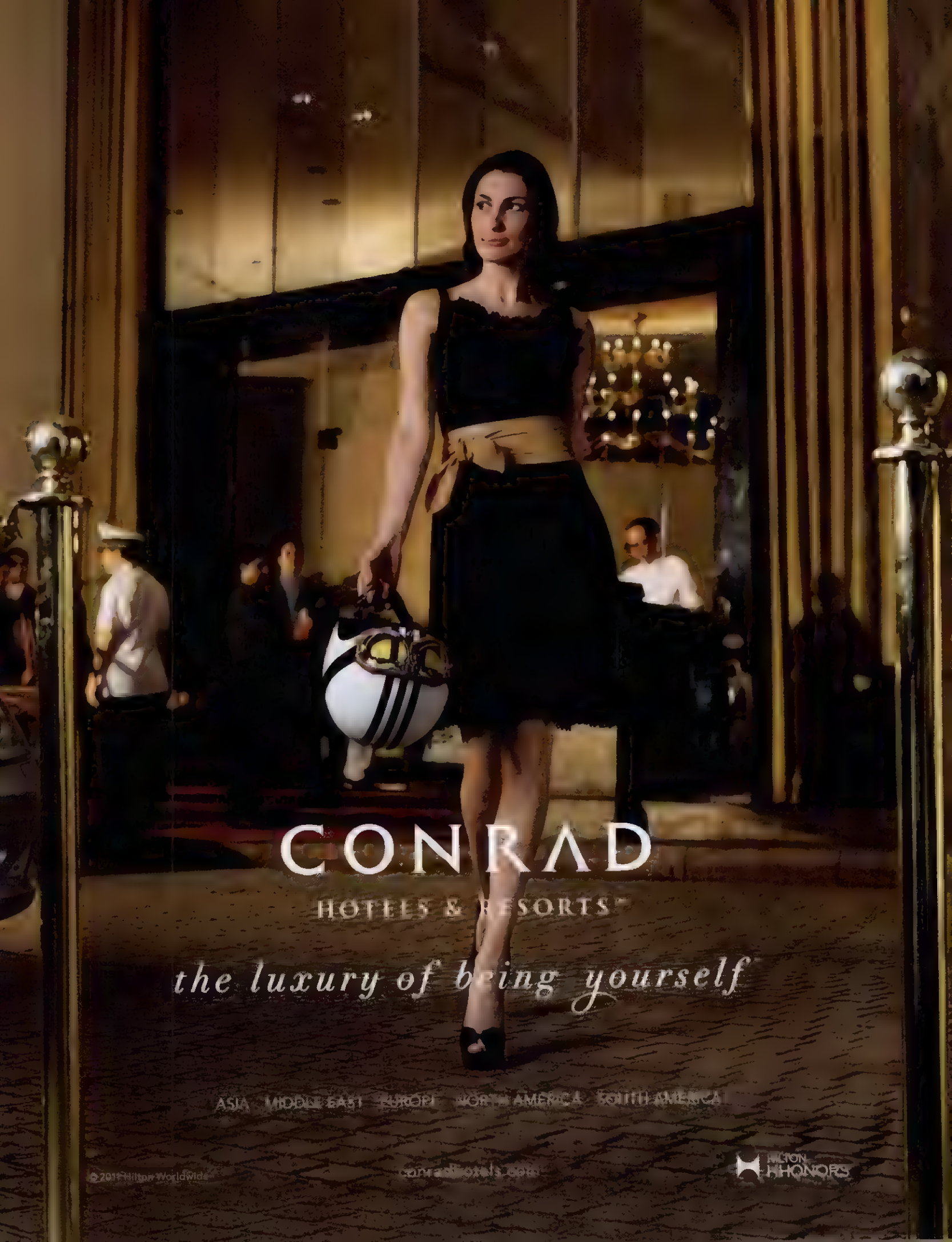
In Fleet Street, not many editors last long. Those who do stick around tend to come in one of five types: the smooth, the calm, the owlish, the dynamic and the apoplectic. David English of the *Daily Mail* was smooth; William Rees-Mogg of the *Times* was owlish; Harold Evans of the *Sunday Times* was dynamic; Kelvin Mackenzie of the *Sun* was apoplectic. Alan Rusbridger is calm. "We've all been hit by a tidal wave," he observes. But his tone is that of a man telling you that he has run into a spot of drizzle.

He is in his office, which rather sums up the two sides of the *Guardian*'s personality. It is amiably cluttered, with books spilling out of shelves and sitting in piles on the floor; but also big and modern, with floor-to-ceiling windows, sparkling canal views and pod-shaped armchairs. It's as if an Oxbridge don had stumbled into a yuppie loft.

His answers are apt to be as measured as his tone. When I say that the *Guardian* seems to be having a triumph and a crisis at the same time, he replies, "If we are, everybody is. Maybe the answer is that everybody is." He gives a studious summary of the market. "If you divide it in old-fashioned terms, and maybe we shouldn't, we're in a market with four papers, and the other three [the *Telegraph*, *Times* and *Independent*] are all owned by billionaires – the Barclay brothers, Rupert Murdoch or [Alexander and Evgeny] Lebedev. The last two declared losses for the *Times* and the *Sunday Times* were £78m and £48m, from memory, so we're doing much better than they are." (When I check the figures, they turn out to be £88m and £45m – followed by £12m. Say what you like about Murdoch, he has got the losses going the right way.)

A sceptic could point out that the *Guardian* might as well be owned by a billionaire, given the losses it has been able to stomach. It is owned by the Scott Trust, set up in 1936 "to secure the financial and editorial independence of the *Guardian* in perpetuity". The trust became a limited company in 2008, but remains trust-like, with all the shares held by the trustees. It also owns most of *Auto Trader* magazine, a cash cow which usually covers the *Guardian*'s losses. The idea that journalists like to believe, that the service they provide is more important than any profit it might make, is enshrined in the Scott Trust's constitution. And Rusbridger says it makes a big difference to what they publish: "The fact that it was the *Guardian* that did the phone-hacking [story] directly flowed from being a trust." But being a trust leads, inevitably, to mistrust: rivals depict the *Guardian* as a trustafarian, not having to make a living in the real world.

"The real world isn't a real world," Rusbridger argues, "because there is nobody in our market, except the *Telegraph*, who is making a profit. All the trust ownership does is to get us on a playing field with the big oligarchs, because otherwise we wouldn't have a chance at all." This is where he mentions the tidal wave. "It's slightly different for all of us. In our case, the big thing that's hit us is that £40m of classified advertising in print has gone, out of an overall turnover of about £230m. That's a huge hole in the budget, which no business is going to absorb easily. Is that a sign of crisis? That *is* the crisis. And unlike the billionaires, we haven't got endlessly deep pock- >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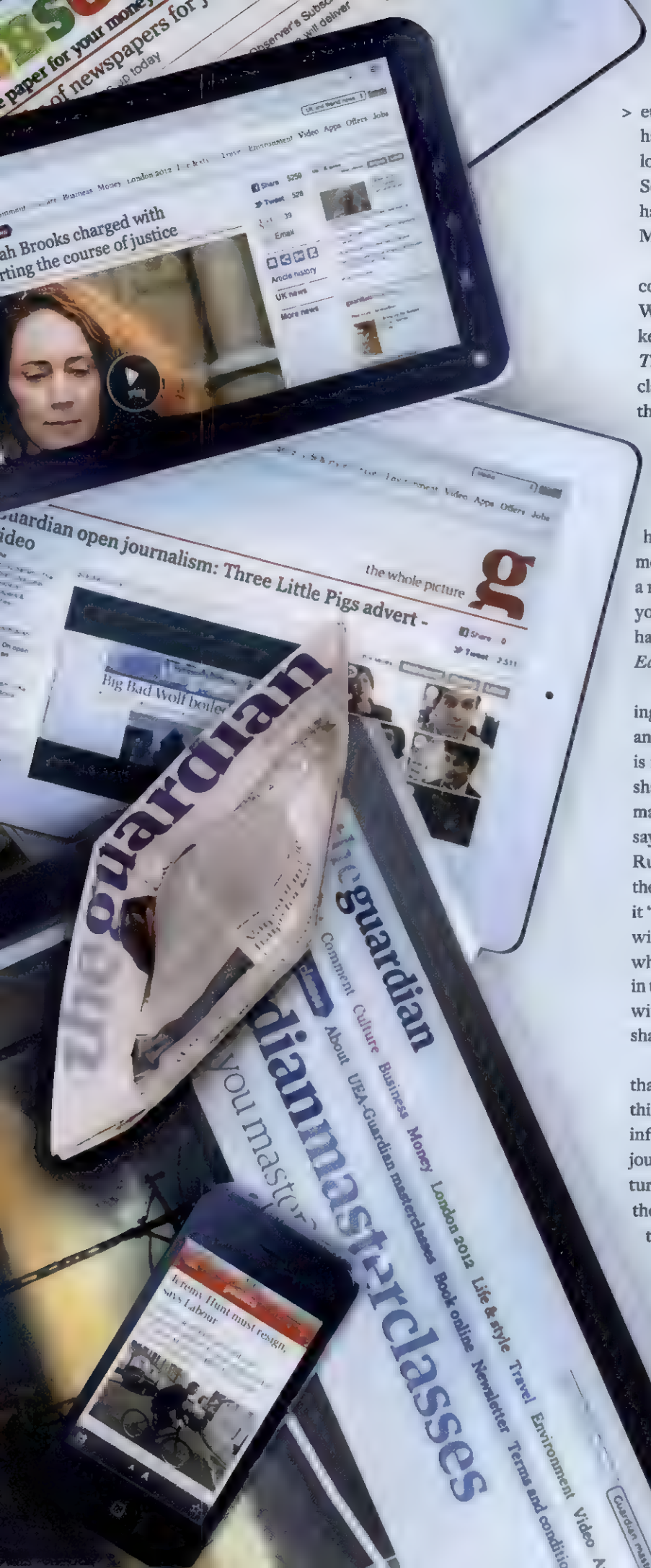


> ets, so we don't have limitless time to sort it out. On the other hand, we've got quite a lot of time, because we've got quite a lot of money, thanks to the extremely clever management of Scott Trust resources over the years." At the last count, they had a war chest of £197m, but the chief executive, Andrew Miller, warned that it would only last "three to five years".

The loss of the classifieds – to specialist websites – couldn't be helped. The web giveth, and the web taketh away. What is more questionable is the *Guardian*'s insistence on keeping its website free. In 2010 its closest domestic rival, the *Times*, placed its content behind a paywall. In the first year, it claimed to have attracted 101,000 digital subscribers, although that included people downloading the paper on the iPad or Kindle, and it paid a heavy price in traffic: by November 2011, according to Searchmetrics, it was receiving only 256 links a week from social media, one for every 10,000 the *Guardian* was getting. In 2011 the *New York Times*, which has been through much the same trauma as the *Guardian*, moved to a porous paywall or freemium model – you can read a number of articles free (20 at first, now ten), but after that you need a subscription. Within a year, the *New York Times* had 454,000 digital subscribers. The *Financial Times* and *The Economist* also have a porous paywall.

The *Guardian* is not against all charges for digital reading. It asks a token sum for its iPhone edition (£4.99 a year), and a more realistic one for the iPad (£9.99 a month). But it is fiercely resistant to charging for its website – a position it shares with the *Mail*, the *Telegraph*, the *Washington Post* and many others. Some editors stay out of these choppy waters, saying the decisions are made by their commercial colleagues. Rusbridger goes the other way – not only is he happy to defend the *Guardian*'s stance, he has built a theory around it. He calls it "open journalism", and in March, in an online Q&A session with readers, he defined it: "Open journalism is journalism which is fully knitted into the web of information that exists in the world today. It links to it; sifts and filters it; collaborates with it and generally uses the ability of anyone to publish and share material to give a better account of the world."

He has become quite evangelical about it. Where did that come from? "Set aside how you're going to pay for all this, and say 'what's the big story about, what's happening to information, what is the big challenge for journalism?' Any journalist who thinks we're still living in the 19th-, 20th-century world in which a newsroom here can adequately cover the world around us in competition with what's available on the open web – well, I think that's very questionable. You can probably do it if you're the *FT* or the *Wall Street Journal* and you're selling time-critical financial information. For a general newspaper, forgive me if you've heard it before but the simplest way of explaining it is this. You've got Michael Billington, distinguished theatre critic, in the front row at the National Theatre. Are you saying you don't need Michael Billing-

ton any more? No, he's the *Guardian* voice, he is the expert. But what about the other 900 people in the theatre, don't they have interesting things to say? Well obviously they do, and if we don't do something with that social experience, somebody else will. And out of those 900 people, 30 will be very knowledgeable. So let's say Michael Billington is as good as it gets, he's 9 out of 10, but the experience of these other knowledgeable people is 6 out of 10, so the margin is 3 out of 10, that's what you're charging for. You either say 'we'll take that then, we'll build a big wall round Michael Billington.' Or you say, 'actually, let's get them on to our platform as well,' and you've got 9 + 6. So what do you do? If you don't do this, that's bad for professional journalism, because you're hedging against what other people can do. If you do do it, you have a much better account of what happens in a theatre, and you begin to think that it was quite odd to send one person on one night and think that was enough. It's just obviously better. Then the question is how do you edit them, and find the people who know their Brecht from their musicals, and that's probably partly software and partly old-fashioned editing.

"And the next question is, if it works for theatre does it work for other areas of journalism? I think it works for everything – investigative, foreign, science, environment. By building networks, you're going with the flow of history, and your journalism is going to be more comprehensive and better. If you reduce it instantly to paywalls, you're not tackling the bigger issue of what's happening to journalism."

Rusbridger makes it sound sensible, even stirring, and you can see how earnest roomfuls of Scott Trustees have been swept along. But you do wonder if it is the *Guardian*'s job to be all things to all theatregoers, and if it over-states the importance of online comments, which are seldom half as well written as the articles. Our sceptic might also note the first thing he said there: "set aside how you're going to pay for all this." How much can the flow of history do to swell the trickle of cash?

When I saw him, Rusbridger was excited about the *Guardian*'s new advertising campaign, a post-modern take on the tale of the Three Little Pigs and the Big Bad Wolf – who, in *Guardian*land, turns out to be the Big Misunderstood Wolf. On February 29th, the ad had its premiere on Channel 4: a lavish production, witty, meticulously detailed, four times the length of most commercials, reckoned to have cost millions. It was clearly made with YouTube in mind, and had reached a million people there by the end of May. It staunched the bleeding of the print readership, which rose by 0.56% month-on-month in March. But it aroused some disdain too.

Juan Señor is a leading expert on newspapers, a Spanish television reporter turned visiting fellow in news media at Oxford University and partner at Innovation Media Consulting, a firm which advises struggling papers. The remedies he prescribes – more explanation, stronger graphics, bolder features, full integration between print and web teams – look much like the medicine the *Guardian* has taken of its own accord. But when he saw the Three Little Pigs ad, he was unimpressed. "Open journalism?" he wrote in a tweet. "How about Profitable Journalism first. The *Guardian* lost £33m last year and counting. Muddled rhetoric, poor model to emulate."

"We are very concerned," Señor tells me on the phone from Los Angeles, "that everybody looks at the *Guardian*'s success in terms of volume of traffic. That is not a measure of success, because you might as well get into pornography. They've played the volume game all along. Open does not need

"BY BUILDING NETWORKS, YOU'RE GOING WITH THE FLOW OF HISTORY, AND YOUR JOURNALISM IS GOING TO BE MORE COMPREHENSIVE"

to mean free, but the *Guardian* associates both things and is almost dogmatic about it, saying that if you put up paywalls you are somehow betraying the spirit of the web. There are Talibans on each side and that's what is hurting the industry. Both extremes are wrong because they do not make money – the *Times* with its paywall and the *Guardian* being free. The truth is somewhere in the middle." He points to the *New York Times*, and to *Aftonbladet*, a Swedish paper that has been charging online since 2003 and, he says, has just reached the point where digital brings in more money than print. "While I love the *Guardian*'s journalism at times, I just don't think it's sustainable. They're announcing even more lay-offs, it's a tragedy. And then they spend the money on the Three Little Pigs."

The lay-offs have been two rounds of voluntary redundancies, one in 2010 which cut about 40 editorial jobs and 60 others from a total of 1,700, and one at the end of 2011, on which the *Guardian* has declined to put a figure (openness has its limits). Over the winter, the squeeze extended to the reader's pocket, with a price hike from £1 per weekday to £1.20. It also showed up on the page. The separate daily sports section, launched in 2005, was reduced to Monday and Saturday only. The separate Media, Education and Society sections were folded into the main paper, the first time the knife had come close to the patient's vital organs. But cuts, for an editor, are a chance to sculpt as well as to slash. Rusbridger – who took a pay cut himself in April, from £438,900 to £395,010 – seized the opportunity to give newspapers another shove towards magazines, adding comment pieces and long profiles to the news pages, and planning some news packages a week ahead, influenced by another Swedish paper, *Svenska Dagbladet*. He calls it "a slight transformation". On Valentine's Day, the *Guardian* put something on the front page that may never have appeared there before as a main topic: love. The piece, an essay >

> by the novelist Jeanette Winterson, was worth £1.20 by itself.

The feeling persists that the *Guardian* may be heading full steam towards an iceberg. At the Open Weekend, I spoke to one of the paper's senior staff, and said that I was writing about the *Guardian* and whether it could survive. "If you find the answer," he said with a rueful smile, "let us know."

Rusbridger himself mixes optimism with wariness. Ask if the iPad will make a difference, with its ability to display something looking quite like the printed page, and he tells you it's too early to say. "We had something like 600,000 total downloads when it was free." How many of those are now paying their £9.99 a month? "I don't think we've released the figures yet, but it's a good take-up." One industry rumour puts it at 28%, which would mean that almost as many people are using the iPad app as are buying the weekday paper.

He is more bullish about social media. "The thing that has changed fastest for us in the past three months", he told me, "is Facebook. It has made a vast difference." As part of its open policy, the *Guardian* got into bed with Facebook to try so-called frictionless sharing: if a reader who is signed into Facebook reads something on the *Guardian* site, the fact that they did so shows up in their Facebook newsfeed, with a link. This irritates some users, but gives the *Guardian* more young readers and a share of the revenue from any ads. "In the last week Facebook has overtaken Google for referrals. We've had 6m downloads of the Facebook app, and it has rocket-charged traffic to Guardian.co.uk. An audience of 18-to-25-year-olds who would never have read the *Guardian* in the past, are falling on *Guardian* content. Facebook are amazed by it, we're suddenly on the Facebook radar in a big way.

"We're in for about five years of twiddling the knobs on digital. There'll be an HTML5 app, an Android app. Google are doing this quite clever thing, a way of building an instant app in 45 minutes rather than six months, a bit like Flipboard. You could have an app tomorrow, put ads on it and share the revenue with Google. It may be that the *Guardian* is entering a sweet spot where the two biggest players in new media are intensely interested in our content, because their users are doing so much with it. The giants of the new world are Google, Facebook, Amazon, Apple and Twitter. If you can get into a position where they are sufficiently interested in a little newspaper from London, there are glimmerings of light that tell you that this is beginning to be quite an exciting strategy."

Meanwhile, the *Guardian* has to find ways of boosting its income. At the end of 2010 it launched *Guardian* Masterclasses, offering courses ranging from songwriting with one of Adele's co-writers (two days, £500) to photographing London at dawn (six weeks, £750) to "How to finish a work of fiction" with the author Gillian Slovo (nine months, £7,000). Seven thousand! The *Guardian*, never a fan of the private schools, seems to have quietly joined their ranks.

"We're not living in a world in which our revenues are going to come from cover price and advertising," Rusbridger argues. "Where can you take the brand? You'll have myriad small sources of revenue." Hence the Open Weekend, an idea borrowed from *Libération*, which holds festivals in several French cities. "The Masterclasses are fascinating, and within a year, it's a million-and-a-half business within the paper. It's not very different from Pearson [owner of the FT, and half-owner of *The Economist*] having education. The notion of what the *Guardian* is is changing so far beyond a newspaper."

The central problem remains: younger people seldom

buy a paper – on the London tube in the morning, the free McPaper the *Metro* wins hands down. And the bigger and better Guardian.co.uk is, the less incentive there is for anyone to hand over their £1.20. Some of the cash spent on the Three Little Pigs might have been better used to show them how much more rewarding the print version is: at the *New York Times*, it is said that the typical print reader spends half an hour with the paper, while the typical online visit lasts half a minute.

With all the money being lost, it feels as if some drastic change must be coming in the British quality market. If the *Guardian* is determined to stay free online, wouldn't it make sense to go free in print, as the London *Evening Standard* has done, with some success? "We've crunched every conceivable number and continue to do so," Rusbridger says. "There are people upstairs with clever models. About five years ago we tried a version of the *i* [the *Independent*'s 20p mini-me, now outselling its parent] and we looked at 50p, 20p, free..." His tone makes it clear that the numbers didn't add up.

The question hanging in the air is how long the print *Guardian* can last. "It depends how quickly Alan reacts," Juan Señor says. "I suspect the *Guardian* will be a weekend paper soon. Online they will exist as they do now, hopefully charging, and they will focus their commercial energy on the weekend."

Many guesses have been made as to when the last Western newspaper will roll off the last press. Some say 2043, others as soon as 2018. Rusbridger quotes his foe: "Murdoch said at Leveson it would be 20 years. I think we would agree that there will probably be a period when there will be fewer papers, beginning with Monday to Friday. Do we have an economic model built in which we keep testing the assumptions? Yes. And do we ask ourselves what would life be like with no newspaper? Yes. You don't want to be in the position, in eight to ten years' time, of going 'oh shit, we didn't think about that.'"

When he's not editing, tweeting, launching websites, supervising investigations or defending open journalism, Rusbridger likes to play the piano. Every summer, he goes on a course. "In 2010 there was a bloke like me on the course who played this amazingly difficult piece which brings concert pianists out in night sweats, Chopin's Ballade No 1 in G Minor. And I thought, if I played it for 20 minutes a day before I come to work, would I be able to do that?"

He kept a diary of the quest and turned it into a book, to be published in September. "When I signed the contract, I had no idea that this was going to be the year of Wikileaks and phone-hacking. So there's some journalism sewn in. But it's a book about amateurism, really. When I started I was 56, and I was also interested in what the middle-aged brain could memorise. I spoke to a couple of neuroscientists who said the brain was very plastic. In your mid-50s, you can learn new tricks." ■

LEARNING

Old polymaths never die

...they just keep on publishing. **Adrian Wooldridge** explores the unstoppable legacies of Isaiah Berlin and Hugh Trevor-Roper

"AND DEATH SHALL have no dominion," Dylan Thomas wrote in one of his better poems. It has certainly had little sway over the careers of two of Oxford's finest minds. Isaiah Berlin, the political philosopher, died in 1997, aged 88; Hugh Trevor-Roper, the historian, died in 2003, aged 89. But in death both men have been more prolific than when they were alive.

Berlin has published four new books on the history of ideas, "The Roots of Romanticism", "Three Critics of the Enlightenment", "Freedom and its Betrayal" and "Political Ideas in the Romantic Age". He has also produced a study of Soviet Communism, "The Soviet Mind", and two thick volumes of letters, with two more still to come. Several of his classic essays have been republished, some in expanded form, and there is still more unpublished material in the Isaiah Berlin Virtual Library (berlin.wolf.ox.ac.uk).

Trevor-Roper has produced a magnificent monograph on a Renaissance doctor, "Europe's Physician: The Various Life of Sir Theodore De Mayerne". "Great history books are few and far between," the *Times Literary Supplement* wrote. "This is one." He has also published a delightfully subversive book on Scottish nationalism, "The Invention of Scotland"; a formidable collection of essays, "History and the Enlightenment"; a volume of letters to the art historian Bernard Berenson; and his wartime journals. And there is more to come: a volume on Britain's Secret Intelligence Services during the war (which will include his short book on Kim Philby), a volume on Nazi Germany, and, if all goes well, a collection of letters to such luminaries as Noel Annan, the leading historian of the British intelligentsia, and Alan Clark, the gloriously badly behaved Tory politician.

We owe this windfall to wonderful work by the two men's friends and pupils – notably Henry Hardy, Berlin's indefatigable amanuensis, and Blair Worden, Trevor-Roper's literary executor. But the windfall raises deeper questions. Why do Berlin and Trevor-Roper command eager audiences among people who never met them? Why did they leave so much of their best work unpublished? And what does the cult of these antique figures – one born in 1909, the other in 1914 – tell us about the relative merits of the academic world that they adorned and the one we have inherited? For it is hard to think of any modern academics who will command such attention after their deaths – or leave such a treasure trove behind them.

TREVOR-ROPER AND BERLIN were not bosom buddies. Berlin spent much of his career at All Souls, Oxford's most gilded cage, where I had the privilege of getting to know him as a young prize fellow; Trevor-Roper loathed All Souls because it had (foolishly) rejected him for a prize fellowship, the only snub in an otherwise pluperfect undergraduate career. They had very different temperaments. Berlin was a people-pleaser. Trevor-Roper could be aloof – "a robot, without human experience, with no girls, no real friends, no capacity for intimacy and no desire to like or be liked" in Maurice Bowra's phrase. This was unkind: he could be generous to the oddest of people and, like any good Christ Church man, he delighted in the sound of broken glass. Richard Davenport-Hines gets closer to the bone when he describes him as "a gregarious introvert".

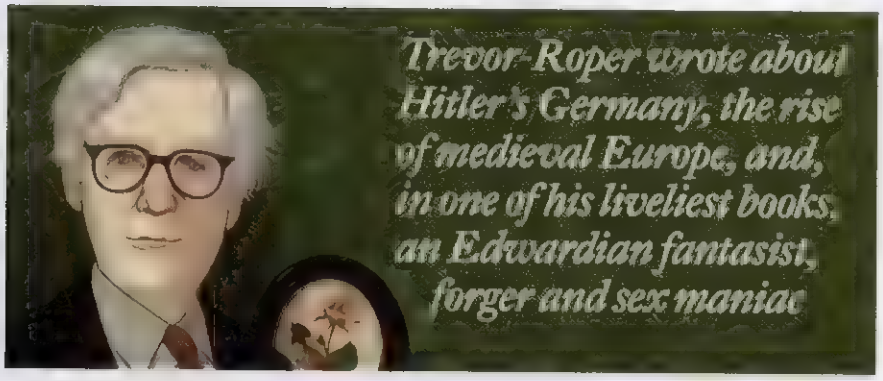
Berlin was one of the great talkers of his age. As a young man in the 1930s he often started a conversation with J.L. Austin, his fellow philosopher, over breakfast in All Souls and continued until lunch. Trevor-Roper preferred the solitude of the study and the discipline of the pen ("the beauty of conversation", he confided to his journals, "consists of the mute, attentive faces of one's fellow talkers"). Still they were on friendly terms, belonged to the same charmed world of Oxford colleges, country houses and smart London salons, wrote for the same periodicals, supped with the same BBC producers, and shared a passion for poking fun at pedants, bores and second-raters.

Both men lived remarkable lives: remarkable enough to justify a pair of biographies, Michael Ignatieff's "Isaiah Berlin: a Life" (1999) and Adam Sisman's "Hugh Trevor-Roper" (2010; American title "An Honourable Englishman"). Berlin was brought up in Riga, in Russian-controlled Latvia, and St Petersburg, or Petrograd as it then was, witnessing both the Social Democratic and the Bolshevik revolutions before fleeing the latter's horrific consequences. He worked at the British Embassy in Washington during the war, in charge of monitoring the changing political winds in Britain's most important ally, and at >

ILLUSTRATION **RICHARD WILKINSON**

> the embassy in Moscow immediately thereafter, meeting Anna Akhmatova (who wrote a poem about him) and Boris Pasternak (who gave him a copy of "Doctor Zhivago" to smuggle out of the country).

Trevor-Roper worked for the Secret Intelligence Service in the war. He teamed up with a group of brilliant Oxford friends, including the philosophers Gilbert Ryle and Stuart Hampshire, succeeded in cracking the radio codes of Hitler's secret service, the Abwehr, and, much to the fury of the old guard, rose up the ranks, ending up as a major. A three-bottle lunch with



Dick White, the head of British intelligence in Berlin, led to one of his greatest works. The Soviets had circulated the rumour that Hitler had escaped from his bunker and was living in the West. White suggested that Trevor-Roper use his forensic skills to prove beyond doubt that Hitler had died in his bunker. The resulting book, "The Last Days of Hitler", turned Trevor-Roper into a celebrity and kept him in funds. "An infinite, endless, golden shower of American dollars flows ceaselessly into my pockets," he wrote at the time.

Both men were at the heart of the British establishment. Berlin's honours included a knighthood, the order of merit (limited to 24 people at a time), and the presidency of the British Academy; he was a director of the Royal Opera and a trustee of the National Gallery. Trevor-Roper was the regius professor of modern history at Oxford and, thanks to Margaret Thatcher, sat in the House of Lords as Lord Dacre of Glanton, thereby gaining a second unwieldy name. He spent an unhappy period as master of Peterhouse, Cambridge, fighting a nest of Tory reactionaries who offended his Whiggish commitment to ordered progress.

Both men embodied a certain idea of Englishness. Trevor-Roper married the daughter of Field Marshal Haig, the British commander in the first world war. He drove a Bentley, hunted to hounds and spent the advance of his first book, "Archbishop Laud", on a horse called Rubberneck. Berlin loved England – "the best country in the world", he was fond of saying – and would have relished William Waldegrave's description of him, at his memorial service, as the perfect embodiment of the English gentleman. Yet neither man was an establishment clone.

Berlin saw himself as a Russian and a Jew as well as an Englishman. Trevor-Roper had no time for the Anglocentric navel-gazing of his Oxford colleagues: he revolutionised the debate about the English civil war simply by pointing out that it was part of a wider European convulsion. He was a mischief-maker in conservative dress. Charterhouse, his public school, was a thought-free zone, he claimed. The intelligence services were dominated by dullards – he described one of his superiors as a "purblind, disastrous megalomaniac" and another as a "farting exhibitionist". (He made an exception for Philby, who later turned out to be a Soviet agent.) He declared that K.B. McFarlane, a revered Oxford medievalist who populated the Oxford history faculty with his acolytes, was "only capable of producing turds the shape of his own arsehole".

Both men specialised in mixing history and philosophy. Berlin abandoned the analytic philosophy of 1930s Oxford for the history of ideas. He wanted to explore the great issues at the heart of political theory by interrogating the great thinkers rather than play games with words. Trevor-Roper believed, like the 18th-century historians who were his models, that "history is philosophy teaching by example". He argued that historians should study problems that illuminated the human condition, such as the relationship between religion and social change or the state and the society that supported it. And he believed that historians can make a unique contribution to studying these problems by escaping the tyranny of time and place: he viewed Nazi Germany through the eyes of Tacitus, and McCarthyite America through the eyes of Erasmus.

THIS MIX OF worldliness and unworldliness – familiarity with affairs of state coupled with philosophical detachment – holds the key to the continued appeal of both men. They chose to address big subjects rather than solve academic crossword puzzles. They wrote for the educated public, not just cloistered scholars. Berlin produced a stream of essays on great political thinkers ranging from German nationalists to Russian novelists. Trevor-Roper roamed across the centuries: though his first love was the 17th century, he also wrote about Hitler's Germany, the rise of medieval Europe, and, in one of his liveliest books, an Edwardian fantasist, forger and sex maniac, Sir Edmund Backhouse.

Trevor-Roper's essays, not least those in one of his posthumous books, "History and the Enlightenment",

are models of their kind, glittering on the surface but built on granite. "When I read one of [his] essays," wrote A.J.P. Taylor, no mean stylist himself, "tears of envy stand in my eyes." He forced generations of undergraduates to read Gibbon and Macaulay, on the grounds that trainee historians need to learn to write before anything else. As one of them, I resented the exercise at the time – we were examined on Gibbon and Macaulay, together with Bede and de Tocqueville, just eight weeks after arriving at Oxford – but I now regard it as one of the glories of my education.

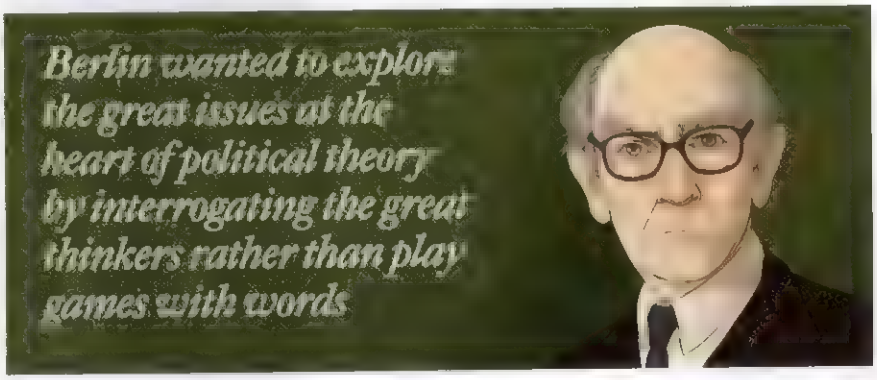
"There is nothing so exhilarating as a good battle," he once declared, and he spent his life in armour. He lit up British intellectual life with merciless assaults on Arnold Toynbee, R.H. Tawney, Lawrence Stone and Evelyn Waugh. And even now that these controversies are long forgotten, it is a wicked pleasure to dig up his essays and watch the destruction. How can anybody have been quite so cruel? (His "liquidation" of Stone, a former pupil, has rightly been described as "one of the most vitriolic attacks ever made by one historian on another".) And yet how can anyone express their cruelty in such perfectly turned prose?

Berlin was not as good a writer. He never used one word where he could use two, as Noel Annan, a friend, put it. He preferred to dictate than to write – the Dictaphone revolutionised his productivity – and this yielded great gusts of prose rather than crafted sentences. Yet to read him is to get an adrenalin rush. He not only reconstructs the mental worlds of thinkers as various as Marx and Herder: he tells us why they were so compelling. He breathed life back into the tiredest old debates and put fizz into the stodgiest German philosopher.

The more Berlin and Trevor-Roper wrote for the educated public, the more they became academic characters, and the more they became academic characters the more they endeared themselves to the wider world. The *New York Review of Books* gave both men as much space as they wanted, turning them into superstars in America. The *Spectator* published a series of Trevor-Roper's articles abut the revolting students of the late 1960s, written anonymously in faux Jacobean prose and later collected together into a book, "Mercurius Oxoniensis", which remains the most palatable account of that depressing period. This public visibility turned them into heroes and role models for generations of sixth-formers who might otherwise have concluded that history was nothing more than a list of dates and philosophy was nothing more than a polite name for intellectual masturbation.

The secret ingredient in the cocktail was the British public. The Britain that produced these two men was infatuated with intellectuals. Or at least with intellectuals of a certain kind – worldly men who knew how power worked rather than the irresponsible fantasists of Paris's left bank. The BBC broadcast hour-long lectures by eminent sages. Penguin produced specials on the great controversies of the day. The *Spectator* and the *New Statesman* ran learned reviews. Even the internal workings of Oxbridge were the subject of widespread fascination, as C.P. Snow demonstrated with his novel about the struggle over the reins of a Cambridge college, "The Masters". London dinner parties discussed the antics of Oxford characters such as John Sparrow, the warden (master) of All Souls, and A.L. Rowse, Trevor-Roper's fellow historian.

Which brings us to another reason for the revival of Berlin and Trevor-Roper's reputations – their talent for portraying their gilded worlds in a ceaseless flow of letters. These are inevitably a mixed bag. They include a lot of Oxford tittle-tattle that nobody but an academic trainspotter could care about today. Trevor-Roper's grand style sometimes feels overwrought when applied to off-the-cuff communication. Taken as a whole, however, they provide a fascinating picture of an age that has now long gone: an age when everybody seemed to know everybody, when academic intrigues were discussed as if they were affairs of state, when academics were friends of duchesses, prime ministers, judges, spymasters and double agents.



Both men paid a price for being so much in the swim of things. Trevor-Roper's reputation was disfigured by his decision to authenticate the "Hitler diaries" in 1983. Here he finally encountered the thorns that lay hidden among the fruits that he had been picking all his life – his refusal to specialise in a particular period and his weakness for Fleet Street. He had padded his income and fed his wife's addiction to country-house living by accepting every fat commission that came his way. He had also become a director of Times Newspapers. But nothing had prepared him for the high-wire world of huge scoops. When he belatedly tried to >

> retract his authentication, Rupert Murdoch is reputed to have said: "Fuck Dacre. Publish." Poor Trevor-Roper was not as worldly as he thought: he dined with the devil but failed to pack a long enough spoon.

Berlin never played with explosives in the same way; he was a consummate academic politician who went out of his way to befriend the powerful and charm potential opponents. Yet his posthumous letters contain a number of ticking time-bombs. They show that this supreme intellectual could also be snobbish and snide. He relished the noxious gossip of academic life. He wrote unctuous protestations of friendship to A.L. Rowse and then sent letters belittling him to other people. "On Forster as bore, 104", reads one entry in the index. "Hates Connolly", reads another.

These may be ordinary vices. But they still have the power to shock coming from someone who is the closest thing that Britain has produced to an academic saint, and they have opened him up to a lot of criticism. David Herman wondered how such an impressive man could also be so "two-faced" and "self-absorbed". For Clive James the letters beg for "belittlement". For A.N. Wilson they are the products of "malicious, snobbish, boastful, cowardly, pompous logorrhoea".

IT IS HARD to gaze on the mounting pile of books by Berlin and Trevor-Roper without worrying that they tell us something about the state of modern academia. The world employs more academics than ever before. Most of these academics believe that they are engaged in a progressive project, producing fresh research, advancing the frontiers of knowledge and putting their predecessors, ever so gently, in their places. And yet many of us prefer to read the work of a couple of dead Oxonians whose minds were formed in the 1930s.

The modern university is governed by an ever-proliferating thicket of rules, some of them invented by the professors themselves, to regulate admission to the guild, some of them imposed by a suspicious public. Aspiring academics must get a licence to operate in the form of a PhD (which can take up to a decade) and then publish in the right specialist journals. They must doff their caps to the lords of their particular universes and genuflect before the latest modish theorems. Academic bureaucrats tell them how to deliver their lectures and interact with their pupils. Yet other bureaucrats, some of them based in universities and others in government, assess their "productivity" and award money or promotions accordingly.

Berlin and Trevor-Roper managed to escape these stifling rules. Berlin wrote a popular book on Marx (in the Home University library, of all tenure-destroying places) rather than bothering with a PhD. A striking proportion of his work appeared in out-of-the-way publications rather than learned journals. Trevor-Roper dispensed with even more academic formalities. He savaged the most revered figure in his field, R.H. Tawney, with the flourish that his work was not only incompatible with the truth but positively repugnant to it. He was an erratic, not to say self-indulgent tutor – sometimes relaxing his academic standards for the sons of dukes, or taking against over-ambitious protégés, as he did with Lawrence Stone, but also sweating blood for obscure young scholars.

This freedom from petty rules meant that Berlin and Trevor-Roper could devote themselves to cultivating the life of the mind rather than tilling a narrow field. They could study whatever caught their interest, whether it be the life of a sex-crazed sinologist or Tolstoy's political philosophy. They could publish when they felt like it, holding back whatever did not pass the twin tests of rigour and readability, rather than dancing to the tune of state funding. Berlin left his lectures to gather dust in his attic. Trevor-Roper left ten books unfinished, including 200,000 words of a planned history of the English civil war, which he laboured over for years in the hope that it would seal his reputation as a great historian, but which he ultimately abandoned in frustration: a believer in the importance of both contingency and profound social forces, he wanted to meld narrative with structural analysis, but could never get the balance right.

They were free to deal with their research pupils on their own terms rather than having to tick bureaucratic boxes. Those terms were generous. For all their celebrity, both men devoted great energy to their pupils. They did not do this to create a school of methodological disciples like Sir Lewis Namier in history or J.L. Austin in philosophy: they were both broad-minded when it came to method. Nor was it because they wanted academic empires. They both lived in a bigger world than academia. They did so because they saw teaching as an integral part of the life of the mind.

Both men became catalysts of excellence. A number of Berlin's pupils have taken up his challenge of communicating ideas to the educated public: John Gray is one of the world's most prolific philosopher-journalists and has also written a book on Berlin. And a number of Trevor-Roper's have taken his contempt for parochialism to heart: Michael Howard, his successor as regius professor at Oxford and one of his first pupils after the war, says that his example inspired him to tackle big subjects. "He was a man of such range, such knowledge, of so many cultures, so many languages, with so holistic an approach to history, that I knew that if I was going to be any good as a historian

I had to start from a pretty broad basis." Trevor-Roper's friends and pupils still have an annual dinner in his honour, at which much wine is taken. Berlin's pupils break into imitations of him at the slightest provocation – the late Jerry Cohen, his successor at All Souls, enlivened his valedictory lecture with a burst of Berlin explaining the influence of the altogether neglected Samuel von Pooped on the totally forgotten Herman von Supine.

Blair Worden was supervised by Trevor-Roper for one term when his regular supervisor was away. But that term proved to be life-changing. When he moved to Cambridge to take up a fellowship, he was surprised to receive lengthy letters from his temporary supervisor: letters that combined gentle guidance with the most scandalous gossip. All these years later, Worden still recalls how the sight of the master's handwriting on the envelope would lift his morale.

Henry Hardy was never even a formal pupil of Berlin's, but got to know him as a philosophy student at Wolfson, the Oxford graduate college that Berlin founded and presided over. In 1974 he approached Berlin with the idea of gathering his scattered writings together. Berlin was reluctant, worrying that they were "sweepings from the cutting-room floor", but warmed to the idea. Hardy's work transformed Berlin's reputation. Before Hardy a question mark had always hung over Berlin's name: was he anything more than a parlour philosopher? Bowra joked that "like Our Lord and Socrates, he does not publish much". Michael Oakeshott introduced him to an audience at the London School of Economics as "a Paganini of ideas", implying he was too showy by half. T.S. Eliot congratulated him on his "torrential eloquence".

But as Hardy began to publish the collected essays, starting with the great "Russian Thinkers" in 1977, the question mark gave way to a series of explanation points. Each volume received ecstatic reviews. Berlin opened up still more: in 1988 he asked Hardy to be one of his literary executors and allowed him to scour his attic and cellar. Hardy was overwhelmed by the quantity of what he found. "It was clear straight away that there were a lot of more-or-less finished pieces of writing, most of them probably prepared as lectures. But Berlin never actively sought to publish his own work." Hardy has now acted as midwife for 16 volumes of Berlin.

The twin cults of Berlin and Trevor-Roper show no sign of fading. They continue to produce new books and fresh insights. They remind us of a world in which academics could be intellectuals and also wonderful writers, and of a time when, as Matthew Arnold put it in "The Scholar Gypsy", "wits were fresh and clear,/ and life ran gaily as the sparkling Thames". ■

Made for a clap-along

Summer's here, and the time is right for family listening on long car journeys. **Laura Barton** takes the wheel

ALABAMA SHAKES HANG LOOSE
The song to herald the start of a vacation – a warm, lolloping testament to the joys of being carefree, with a pleasingly wormy guitar line and a hefty sing-a-long chorus. "Hang loose, hang loose/Let the ocean worry 'bout bein' blue," it buoys. "Hang loose, hang loose/Go with the tide, and I'm a-take care of you..."

JOHN "COUGAR" MELLENCAMP
JACK & DIANE
Narrative songs are an excellent way to engage tetchy young travellers, and they should be young enough not to think this is uncool. A sweet little ditty from 1982, it tells an engaging tale of teenage romance in America's heartland, all chilli dogs, James Dean and running off to the big city.

MELANIE BRAND NEW KEY
Melanie's plaintive tale of childhood crushes and rollerskating supplies the pop frivolity a summer holiday requires. The younger members of the family may require a bit of background along the lines that, once upon a time, rollerskates attached to one's shoes by means of a small key, easily misplaced.

STAPLE SINGERS
I'LL TAKE YOU THERE
If you're a parent with control of the CD player and a captive audience sitting in the back, you might care to use the time for a little musical and social education. This 1972 hit wraps up civil rights, religion and striving for a better place in a blanket of gospel call-and-response, funk, reggae and sweet Muscle Shoals soul. Music at its richest.

ANDREW BIRD DANSE CARRIBE
One of the best things about holidays is the shift in rhythm they bring to our days. This track, from the multi-instrumentalist Bird's recent album "Break It Yourself", is a real celebration of rhythm – all polyrhythmic loops and near-Afropop pace, embellished with whistling, violin and near-jabberwocky lyrics.

VIOLENT FEMMES
BLISTER IN THE SUN
Communal activities are a crucial element of the family car journey, and what finer example than the double hand-clap? The annals of rock and pop history offer many examples, but this thrilling, lyrically abstruse record from 1983 is propelled by a sneery bassline and a repeated double drumbeat: made for a clap-along.

STEELEYE SPAN
ALL AROUND MY HAT
For all the staycationers in Britain – or visitors relishing the unapologetic celebrations of this much-Jubileed and Olympic summer – here's a taste of sublime Englishness: a Cockney costermonger's song from the 1820s, telling of mourning for a far-flung love, full of green willows, prudence and farewells. There have been many recordings over the years, but this electric folk version from 1975 is the definitive one.

PAUL SIMON GRACELAND
Simon's 1986 album, a marriage of American folk pop and South African vocal harmony and instrumentation, is enjoying a revival this summer with a 25th-anniversary world tour. For many, it remains the definitive sound of family car journeys, and its title track, the tale of a divorced dad and his son driving to Elvis's home in Memphis, Tennessee, is the jewel in its crown.

All songs available at iTunes

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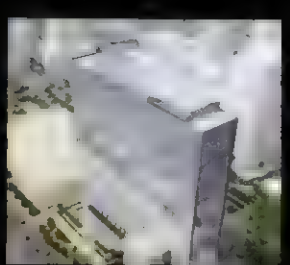


Fairmont Makati, Philippines (opening soon)

Fairmont The Palm, Dubai (opening soon)

Tom Shone *At the Cinema*

Hitchcock's films are still bewitching – because his ambivalent view of the stars reflected ours

WHAT ARE MOVIE stars for? These days, we expect them to display powers of transformation, a very different thing from acting, involving the donning of false noses and prosthetic chins, or a five-month spell in the wilderness without hair conditioner, so that critics can fall over themselves to pronounce the star "a chameleon" who has rendered themselves "unrecognisable" to all but the millions sitting in cinemas muttering mutinously, "Nicole Kidman's false nose looks droopy." Such self-uglification would have been anathema to the stars of the golden age. "To watch her is to achieve direct, cleansed perception of something which, like a flower or a fold of silk, is raptly, unassertively, and beautifully itself," wrote Kenneth Tynan of Garbo, who regarded the impersonation of other people as running a poor second to the more pressing task of being herself.

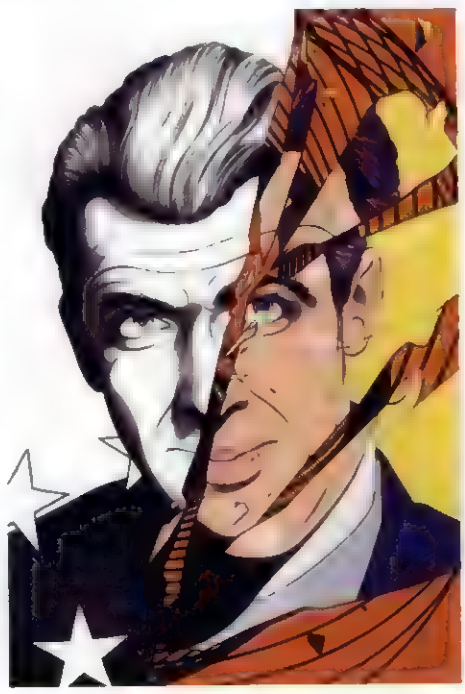
Then there is Alfred Hitchcock's way, which goes something like this. Take an actor who is a decorated war hero. Nothing too fancy: the Distinguished Flying Cross for completing 20 missions deep into Nazi Germany, say. Upon his return home, let him visit his parents and come back to the screen in something toasty like "It's a Wonderful Life"; then, with public affection for this All-American hero at its warmest, cast him as a misanthrope, a peeping Tom and a necrophiliac. That is what Hitchcock did with James Stewart, in "Rope", "Rear Window" and "Vertigo", opening up a vein of agony that no one had seen before. This Jimmy Stewart talked murder, spied on neighbours and obsessed about fashioning new lovers in the image of old, dead ones. Such a wonderful life.

Nobody worked with stars better than Hitchcock. No director had a better feel for the electromagnetic hum they give off, how to use it to charge a plot, or flip the current into reverse. Starting in August, the British Film Institute is screening all 39 of Hitchcock's films, from the early silents to post-war masterpieces such as "Notorious" and "North by Northwest", made as the studio system was beginning to disintegrate. The stars began choosing their own roles, giving their image the slip, dabbling in self-deconstruction. Which is where Hitchcock came in, with his Dorian Gray instinct for counter-casting: divining a mirror-image of the face a star presents to the world, and asking them to play that.

He identified the note of post-war disillusion in Stewart. He allowed Ingrid Bergman to slip her halo as a drunk in "Notorious". He salted the ethereal Grace Kelly with lubriciousness in "To Catch a Thief". He found an edge of cruelty to Cary Grant, best known as a light comedian. In his Hitchcock films ("Suspicion", "Notorious", "North by Northwest", "To Catch a Thief") Grant gives off the hard glitter of a diamond. "I've always been afraid of women," he confesses in "Notorious", which is like Einstein saying that he's always been ambivalent about equations.

Hitchcock still shot the stars handsomely. Kelly's entrance in "Rear Window", in a black-and-white beaded chiffon gown, is a special effect in its own right. But his urge to worship was matched by a pull towards desecration: you don't get to run down a bespoke Cary Grant with a crop-duster plane in the middle of nowhere, for no discernible reason, without raising a few suspicions. Hitch "likes me a lot," Grant told one of his co-stars, "but at the same time he detests me." What gives these films their enduring punch is the echo between Hitchcock's mixed feelings and the audience's own. We envy these fabulous unicorns and want to be them, but we also resent the hold they have on us. When Hitchcock killed off Janet Leigh in "Psycho" after 20 minutes of screen time, it was an assault on her fame, as much as on her character.

We seem embarrassed by stardom now. The stars' publicists pounce every time an interviewer asks a question unrelated to acting technique, or "process". Whenever someone pointed out to Alexander Payne, during the Oscar run for "The Descendants", that his star, George Clooney, was indeed a movie star – as opposed to a grizzled veteran of Strasberg and Stanislavski – Payne looked as if he had been punched in the kidneys. Tarantino used to know how to cast his films, but nothing in his recent work matches the scene in "Pulp Fiction" when Vincent and Butch stare each other down in the nightclub, for no other reason but that Bruce Willis and John Travolta appearing *in the same shot* mucks with all known laws of cinematic space-time.



The Coens are witty casters, loosing Jeff Bridges' inner stoner in "The Big Lebowski", and uncovering a pudding-bowled psychopath in Javier Bardem in "No Country for Old Men" – a slyly intuitive choice, right out of Hitchcock's book. The lady-killers are always the ones you have to watch. Darren Aronofsky, too, has become a Prospero-like manipulator of star power. He saw the bruised pathos in Mickey Rourke for "The Wrestler" and enabled Natalie Portman's self-mortifications in "Black Swan", two *trompe l'oeil* turns shadowed with the back-story of the actors themselves – Rourke's long spell in the wilderness, and Portman's struggle to ditch her princess image. Both turned their bodies into battlegrounds.

That is how we like our stars today: fleshy and scarred, like pieces of meat. Norman Bates, you feel, would have approved. But then these days Bates would be up on the Oscar stage, thanking his mother. ■

ILLUSTRATION **ANDREW ARCHER**

AUTHORS ON MUSEUMS

Sanctum in the city

Amid the frenzy of New York, the Old Masters of the Frick hang in contemplative calm. **Don Paterson** revisits his favourites, and catches up with the ghost of a fellow poet

New York has shaped most of my major life choices. My first serious adult relationship was with a New Yorker; my closest friend was a New Yorker; my partner is a New Yorker. I may never be one, but if "home" is where one relaxes most, the length of my exhalation when I fall out of Penn Station seems to indicate something beyond mere relief.

It's not too mysterious. First, there's the way the natives communicate: they speak the way I prefer to be spoken to – nice and quickly, with an overdeveloped sense of irony. Irony is a whole dialect here, within which you can still be funny, moving, open, generous, sincere. Secondly, since I have little by way of an inner life, my resting state is a deep boredom, and New York is the least boring place I know.

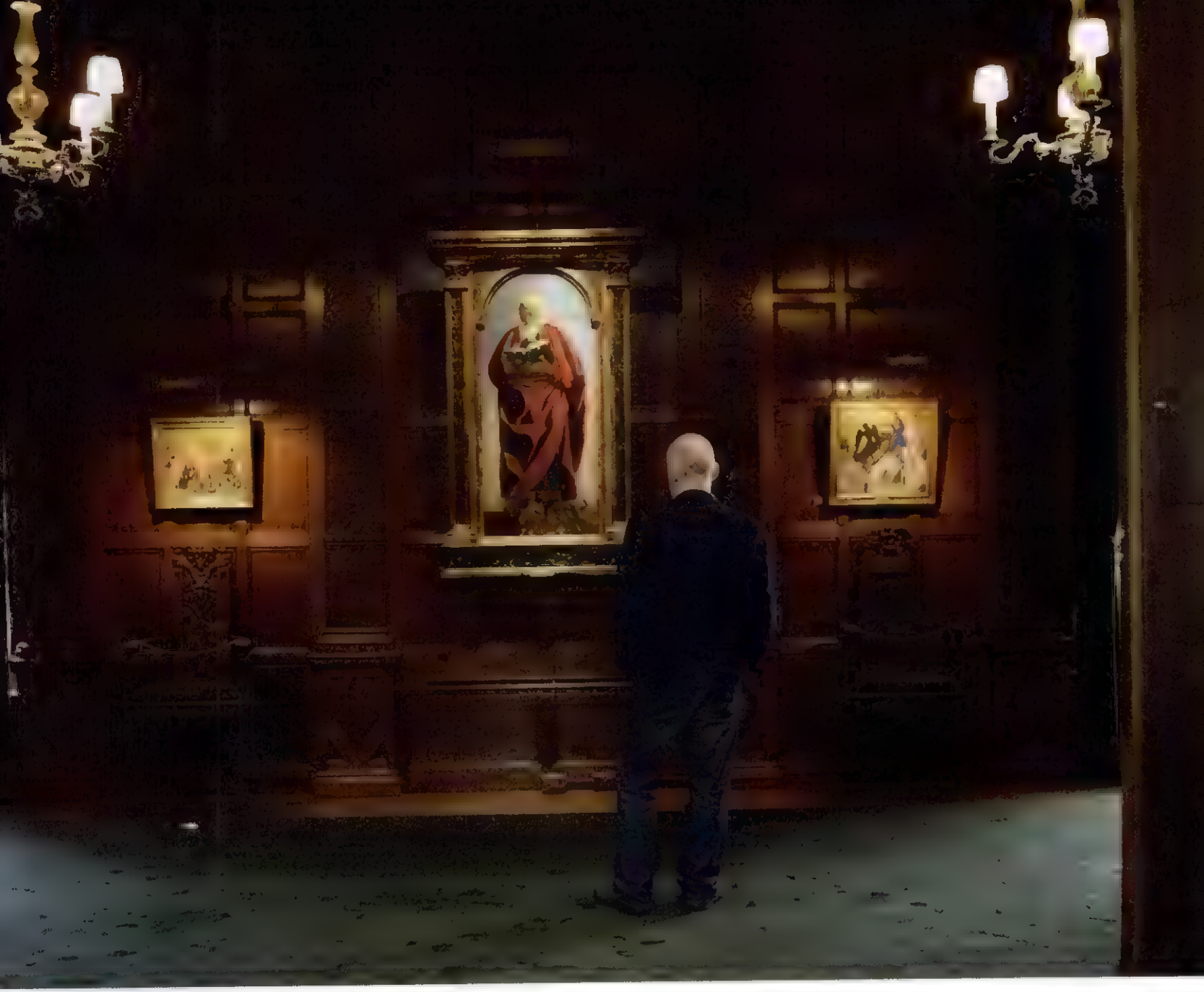
New York's great secret – or rather the truth it cannot openly declare – is that it is the European capital of your dreams. Lord knows, it isn't really America. I'm always bewildered by friends who visit, and then plan five things to do every day – a gallery, a trip to Katz's Deli, a show…They're missing the point. The city is the show. Architecturally, for example, its brutal grid serves only to highlight its insane, principled, obsessive variety. No two adjacent buildings are the same; and no building embodies the beauty and lunacy of the place like the Frick Collection, a jaw-dropping limestone pile taking up a whole block at the corner of 70th Street and Fifth Avenue. It's never long before I wind up here, as often by blind instinct as design. (For others, it's not the art that makes it a place of pilgrimage. Every casual geek will tell you that Batman's Gotham City is "Manhattan below 14th Street at 11 minutes past midnight on the coldest night in November", but less well known is the fact that the Avengers' mansion is the Frick: 890 Fifth Avenue is the same address as 1 East 70th.)

Henry Clay Frick (1849-1919) was a pretty dreadful piece of work. He made his money in the coke industry – not the one that underwrites the hedge funders who now make up half the Upper West Side, but the black stuff – and his first million before he turned 30. He invested in the railways, became a business partner of Andrew Carnegie, and was soon supremely wealthy. But even the film they play in the Frick's Music Room can't entirely avoid mentioning one of a number of shameful events that gave him his reputation for unscrupulous ruthlessness. The movie judiciously skirts round his response to the Johnstown Flood, when an ill-conceived fishing lake designed for Frick, Carnegie and his other cronies burst its banks and flooded the valley below, killing thousands. Although he made some token compensation, Frick ensured that all efforts to hold the South Fork Fishing and Hunting Club responsible were foiled (the victims' failure to secure damages led directly to changes in American law on liability). But it does touch on his breaking of the Homestead Steel Strike of 1892, which ended with the death of several steelworkers – and an assassination attempt on Frick shortly after.

When Frick finally left Pittsburgh for New York, it was initially to reside in the Vanderbilt mansion on Fifth. The Vanderbilts were not known for their delicate touch with interior decoration, Edith Wharton going so far as to declare them "entrenched in a sort of Thermopylae of bad taste"; but whatever faults Frick had, bad taste was not one of them. He had begun as a collector of modern art, then turned his attention to the Old Masters, and had already amassed a world-class collection by the time he arrived in New

More taste less speed
BELOW Set back from the relentless traffic, the Frick overlooks Fifth Avenue like a "little Petra"
RIGHT Don Paterson contemplates Piero della Francesca's "St John the Evangelist", undisturbed by children, crowds or chatter

PHOTOGRAPHS **GRANT DELIN**



York. Presumably further inspired or repulsed by the baroque excess of his temporary digs, he conceived a mansion of starkly contrasting neoclassical simplicity, to show his art to best advantage. Thomas Hastings, architect of the New York Public Library, was commissioned to design and build it, and the astonishing result was a little Petra seemingly carved from whatever giant lump of unhewn rock had once joined 70th and 71st. (It is said that Frick hoped "to make Carnegie's place look like a miner's shack". He did.)

Frick lived there only a few years before his death, and it was always his intention that the collection would be open to the public. I'd like to think that this was his guilty reparation for a life of unbridled greed, but who knows what he was thinking.

Wandering in off the street – the sirens, the shouting, the car horns used instead of brakes – you discover the architectural equivalent of a pair of Bose noise-cancelling headphones. The place is so quiet, the effect is less of silence than *deafness*. How could such a still space be carved from such a noisy city? There are several answers. Most crucially, there are no kids. I love kids, mine especially, but they can ruin things. No child under ten is allowed into the Frick. This would be a horrid rule applied more generally; but shouldn't there be the occasional designated adult space, beyond bars, bookies and strip clubs?

The place is so quiet, the effect is less of silence than deafness

The second thing keeping the peace is the visitors' own Trappist silence: this museum attracts a class of folk who do not want their own concentration disturbed, and so will not disturb yours. And the third is plain, old-fashioned awe. The Frick astonishes because there are few surprises; it barely contains a single painting that will not already be familiar to you. The only surprise is that they are all here. Well-spaced, breathing freely, often arranged by no other organising principle than supremely good taste, in uncluttered rooms of perfect classical dimensions. >

Pulling power
Bellini's "St Francis in the Desert" has a magnetic attraction – and not just because it's a great painting

Isn't it odd how you feel the presence of some artists almost before you see them?

> I first came here about 23 years ago. I was living in Brighton with a girl from Brooklyn, and we were still in love enough to want to impress each other, competitively. I showed her the Scottish Highlands; she showed me the Brooklyn Bridge. I took her to Princes Street Gardens; she took me to the Frick, and won. These days, I'm really here for my half-dozen favourite paintings, and deliberately take the most circuitous route I can towards them. This often involves an aimless half hour in the beautiful Garden Court, all marble and foliage and fountains; it was once an open courtyard, but was covered and enclosed after Frick's death. The work was accomplished so seamlessly it's impossible to believe it didn't form part of the original house. I defy anyone to see it, and not have it form part of their vision of an afterlife.

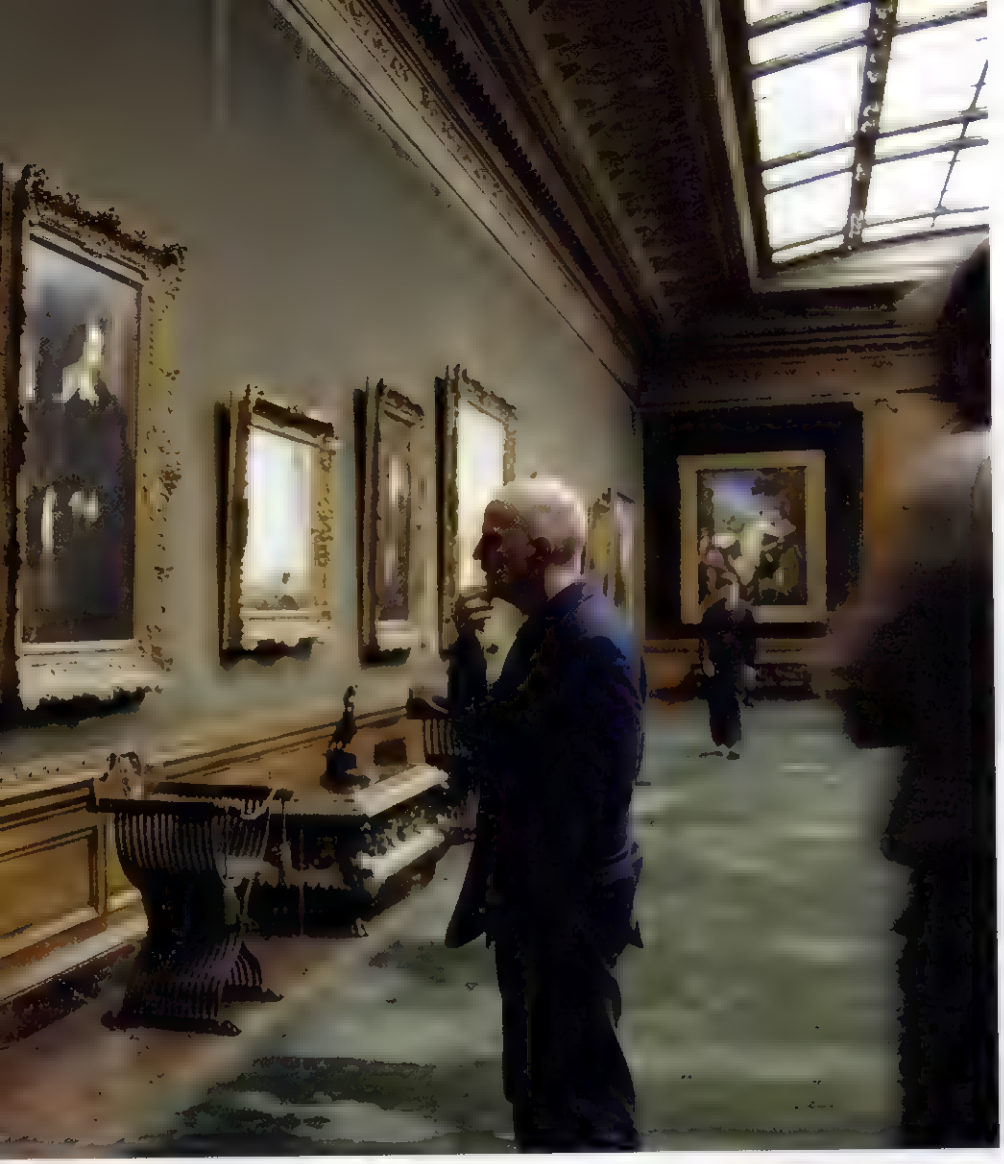
The day I visit, there's also a Renoir exhibit, so I go to see that first. Why does *anyone* like Renoir? Every canvas looks like a ten-foot biscuit tin. I take a sort of refuge in Corot's "The Lake". It's both a terrific painting and an absolute downer, which I return to again and again for reasons I cannot explain. A yellowy-brown monochrome watercolour-in-oils, its light is bleary, blurry, heavy, sodden, purgatorial. The cattle look bewildered and lost. It reminds me intensely of my depressions, which I am largely free of these days. Perhaps I love it because I know I can turn my back on it. I head for the Fragonard Room, confident that if this can't cheer me up, nothing will.

The Fragonard Room is the clearest piece of evidence that this is a house built with art in mind. Plans for a drawing room were altered to accommodate a series of wonderful, ridiculous panels depicting the Progress of Love. Against the backdrop of an impossibly rococo arcadia, an assortment of beribboned, bewigged, pomaded and pantalooned twerps and nincompoops spoon and sport. Below a statue of Cupid, a woman swoons in a *dégagé* reverie, her eyes rolled up to the whites. Banksy would have added a hypodermic needle dangling from her arm. You feel deeply protective of these figures. They depict a heaven, of sorts, though not one to which we should aspire.

And then, like an old friend, I see Constable's "Salisbury Cathedral from the Bishop's Grounds". This painting is missing the ugly rack of cloud that looms in the V&A version, and I agree with Bishop John Fisher that this approach is a big improvement. The trees have the weird underlight of coming storm, which renders the pale cathedral and its infinite spire perfectly radiant, and straightforwardly mystical. From the other side of the room, I always think I'm approaching a Samuel Palmer. The painting seems to generate more and more natural detail before your eyes, in an almost fractal way, as a result of your own deeper looking: this is still the old, wild, pullulating English countryside, capable of the spontaneous creation of life. The effect is enhanced by Constable's having painted this more quickly than his first version, so the natural impressionism you see in his watercolours is evident in the more hastily sketched detail. One cow has been painted as glass, with the grass still visible through it. It looks more cow-like than ever.

The Frick also has my least and my second favourite Vermeer. (The one I love most is "The Lacemaker", which I caught at the Fitzwilliam recently, in a room so busy I saw one guy looking at it through binoculars.) My least favourite is "Bum Handing a Folded Map of the London Underground to Man in Drag", otherwise known as "Mistress and Maid". This was the last painting Frick bought, and one of his favourites. Maybe I'm just trying to disagree about something. But the expressions of both women are, to me at least, so open to interpretation as to be not worth troubling over. I ask myself all the questions I have been instructed to ask. Is the note from a lover? How much does the servant know? What does the lady's chin-hand gesture mean? Who knows? Who cares? I've tried to, and failed. The failure is mine alone.

"Officer and Laughing Girl", on the other hand, is



the one I'd leave with under my jacket. How can this be not now? Never has someone looked so convincingly entertained, captivated, alive. Just like the cock-and-bull story he's telling, the officer looms too large in the foreground. There's a theory that this might have been a distortion introduced by Vermeer's use of the camera obscura, but heavens, does it work. Everything lives in that picture. Even the light gathering in the carved scoops of the window frame shouts, "Today!" The upside-down and thoroughly unreliable map of Holland on the wall serves to remind us that everything changes, and nothing changes at all.

Isn't it odd how you feel the presence of some artists almost before you see them? Frick was a sucker for a strong personality. You know the Ingres by the stare of the Comtesse d'Haussonville on the back of your neck, the Piero della Francesca by the ghostly clump of John the Evangelist's big, solid feet, the Turners from their focal blaze in the corner of your eye. But one painting seems to work by sheer physical magnetism, and reminds me of the real reason I keep coming back here: Bellini's "St Francis in the Desert". And then I remember the reason I keep coming back to the Bellini.

Michael Donaghy was a poor Irish boy from the Bronx, the product of the kind of household that would have done its kids a lot less damage if it had divorced. But, as his namesake Jack Donaghy (played by Alec Baldwin) once said in "30 Rock", "The Irish mate for life. Like swans. Like drunk, angry swans." His loving, violent upbringing left Michael a neurotic, ethereal, infinitely sweet man, much too sensitive to suffer this bruising planet for the full term. He was a polymath, who read everything and was incapable of forgetting any of it. He would go through periods so book-obsessed he would not watch his dreams but read them. He claimed to have run with a gang called the Bronx Philologists, and bought his drugs from a guy called Schwa. He made a lot of stuff up. He was also one of the finest poets of the age. I loved him dearly, and suffered his death as I would a brother's.

His head, as they say in Dundee, was full of doors, all banging. The doorless silences of the Frick created a place of asylum for Michael. A keen student of the Italian Renaissance, his poetry is full of references and buried allusions to the masters. "St Francis in the Desert" was his favourite painting, and he would stand entranced before it, hour after hour. The trance was often heavily drug-induced. On one occasion, he told me, he spent the afternoon helplessly frozen in Francis's own pose – until he was physically removed from the premises, the complaint that he was about to receive the stigmata falling on deaf ears.

The Bellini really is a grand thing to stand in front of for an hour, and the miracle is that you can still actually do this, in New York, at lunchtime, largely without human interruption. Everything in the picture is, you soon notice, turned towards the glory off-stage. The crane, the distant turrets, the skull on Francis's desk, even the slow dumb donkey: all are helplessly drawn to the unseen source. (I had this as my desktop in the late 1990s – a clickable version on which the saint's foot opened Word, and so on. My instinct is still to jab at his sandals in order to check my e-mail.)

Francis's chest-forward, open-armed pose has more than a touch of Eric Cantona about it – someone basking proudly in the glory as much as humbly before it, accepting as much as he is rendering. It makes me think of what Rilke meant when he described us as "receivers": less passive recipients of the Word than active listeners for it, less pocket radio than Very Large Array. After half an hour I move out of Donaghy's shade and leave him standing there, tuned in, at last, to a pure and noiseless signal, and blissfully invisible to the security guards. And I head back out into the chaos and car horns of Fifth Avenue, relieved that I still know where to find him. ■

The Frick Collection is open Tuesday to Saturday, 10am-6pm, Sunday 11am-5pm; frick.org

Waiting for Corot
TOP Don Paterson finds "The Lake" both compulsive and unsettling
ABOVE "Officer and Laughing Girl" by Vermeer is the painting he would most like to take home

BOOKS

NOTES ON A VOICE

Martin Amis

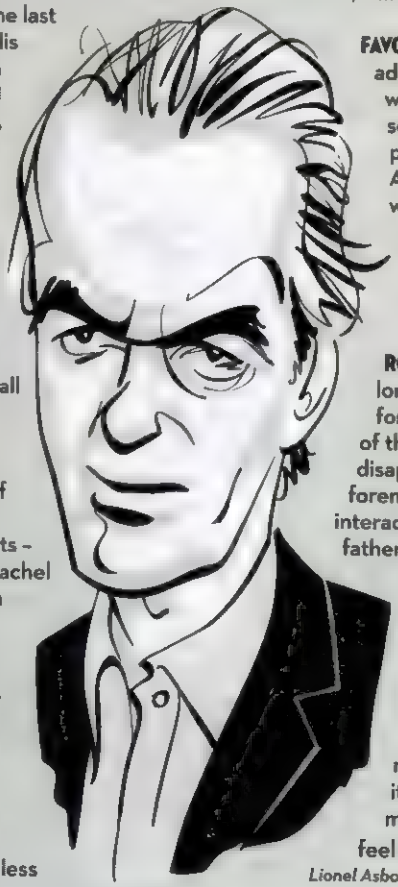
His father Kingsley said, "I wish he would just once write a sentence like, 'Then they finished their drinks and left.'" Martin Amis would rather eat bees than risk being so boring. At 62 he is still the most exciting living British writer for anyone concerned with vivid prose. Ian McEwan can be more formally exact, Iain Sinclair more jaggedly musical, Salman Rushdie more wildly imaginative. But you settle into an Amis novel, or essay, confident that he'll cut to the heart of the subject with withering intelligence. "He has a style", wrote John Carey, Britain's leading literary critic, "as quick and efficient as a flick-knife."

Amis's fiction aims to excite, to confront and argue, but in a cool modern idiom. His words race around the reader like pack-hounds, harrying and snapping. His sentences seldom luxuriate in baths of description. He can whizz through catalogues of sexual misbehaviour and violent excess, but always offhandedly, as if you, the reader, know this stuff already. He used to be a sucker for the Risky Flourish: the last line of "Dead Babies" (1975) is, "His green eyes flashed into the dawn like wild, dying suns." A damaged romantic occupies his vivid brain, along with a deranged Jeremiah, a chronicler of masculine despair and a cartographer of transatlantic excess. In "The Information" (1995), critics detected a mellowing, a gentler tone, a new chattiness. Perhaps horrified, Amis amped up the grimness to take on suicide, porn and Stalin's gulags and give them all a dark, atonal music.

GOLDEN RULE Avoid clichés – not just of language (obviously) but of the mind and the heart. Plotting included. His early books had plots – a campaign to win a girl in "The Rachel Papers" (1973), the revelation of a killer in "Dead Babies", the rise and fall of two men in "Success" (1978) – but he ditched them as wheezing old motors, in favour of elaborate structures of ideas and serio-comic special effects.

KEY DECISIONS Don't bother with ancient literary tropes such as evocations of place or person, unless their grotesquerie brings heat. Don't do weather unless it's entropic or apocalyptic. Don't try love scenes (what are you, Joanna Trollope?). Do sex, so long as it's awkward, pitiless or absurd. Choose darkness over light, especially in humour. Confront, dramatise, outrage, shock into laughter.

STRONG POINTS (1) The paragraph-long unfolding of a single conceit: assimilating John Self's ruined teeth to the Upper West Side and Lower East Side of Manhattan in "Money"; charting the sexual failure of the good writer with his wife, in "The Information", as if it were a parade of erotic triumphs, on the stairs, in the kitchen, on the landing. (2) Excess. He piles detail on wildly improbable detail, as in the concordance of Nicola Six's kisses, in "London Fields" (1989). More is more. (3) Wit. He is especially funny about the chin-jutting egotism of the *Sun*-reading classes – which is why his 13th novel, "Lionel Asbo", will be devoured.



FAVOURITE TRICK Repetition. Amis adores emphatic reiteration, whether for personal crises or social history: "The 1940s was probably the last we decade. And all decades, until 1970, were undeniably he decades... But the Me Decade was also and unquestionably the She Decade" – "The Pregnant Widow" (2010).

ROLE MODELS Nabokov for lordly language. Swift and Joyce for shameless inspections of the body and its myriad disappointments. Updike for forensic close-ups of human interaction. His hero and surrogate father-figure Saul Bellow for wisdom, and the pooh-poohing shade of his actual father, Kingsley Amis, for comedy.

TYPICAL SENTENCE From "London Fields": "And meanwhile time goes about its immemorial work of making everyone look and feel like shit." – JOHN WALSH

Lionel Asbo Cape, out now, reviewed opposite

ILLUSTRATION **KATHRYN RATHKE**

FOUND IN TRANSLATION

A classic, uncertainly

AUTHOR **JAVIER MARÍAS**
ENGLISH TITLE **A HEART SO WHITE**
ORIGINAL TITLE **CORAZÓN TAN BLANCO (1992)**
ORIGINAL LANGUAGE **SPANISH**
TRANSLATOR **MARGARET JULL COSTA**

If you have a fondness for the short sentence, Javier Marías is a writer to convince you of the virtues of the very long one. This novel was first published in English in 1995, and won the Dublin IMPAC award in 1997. Now, along with three other Marías books, it is appearing as a Penguin Modern Classic. It was the first of his novels to bear what has since become his signature style: sentences which spool down the page, slipping between times and tenses, story and speculation, experience and memory.

The writing is carefully calibrated to disrupt the reader's sense of certainty. A shot rings out on the first page of the book, a suicide which has become a dark family secret. The narrator, Juan, gradually uncovers the story behind it, and along the way he meditates on whether we can really know other people, and more startlingly whether we really want to.

Marías's prose is also subtly repetitive – snatches of thought, dialogue and observation appear again and again, as if acting out the mysterious way in which fragments of the past inflect the present. Juan is an interpreter by trade and one of the joys of the book is the supple meaning wrung from every word and gesture. But interpretation poses a philosophical question too: in trying to understand our lives and the lives of others, do we not embroil ourselves in falsehood?

This is classic Marías and it's a classic translation. Margaret Jull Costa, who has been working with Marías since the early 1990s, is in the premier league of translators from Spanish, and she renders these complex sentences in elegant and mellifluous English. – SIMON WILLIS

A Heart So White Penguin, August 2nd

CORBIS

Maggie Fergusson *Six Good Books*

Total immersion with Hilary Mantel, a reality check from Jackie Kay and new light on Graham Greene

NOVELS **Bring Up the Bodies by Hilary Mantel** (4th Estate, hardback, out now). Hilary Mantel's Man Booker-winner "Wolf Hall" is a contemporary classic, for two good reasons. It convinces us of a beating heart beneath the black cloak of history's pantomime villain Thomas Cromwell, and plunges us five-senses-first into Tudor England in a way that's neither quaint nor contrived. Equally compelling, this sequel reveals a third strand to Mantel's genius: an ability to plant readers squarely in a drama while keeping them aware of ghosts crepitating in the wings. It covers the months leading up to the execution of Anne Boleyn, whom Cromwell frames with habitual cunning and casuistry. But away from the public chessboard he's troubled by melancholy and a mottled conscience, particularly on account of Cardinal Wolsey. Mantel's prose mirrors his shifting moods – mandarin as he assembles his case against the queen, it becomes lyrical as he mourns his wife and daughters. The novel demands total immersion. Don't rush it.

Lionel Asbo by Martin Amis (Cape, hardback, out now). In this savage black comedy, Amis takes a comprehensive swipe at contemporary Britain – its schools, press, ageism, obsession with celebrity and wealth, and unwillingness to engage with reality. Lionel Asbo is a loutish, unsuccessful criminal, a cross between Bill Sikes and a "Little Britain" caricature. When he wins £139,999,999.50 on the Lottery (moral: the loser takes it all), he uses it to acquire a *Hello* lifestyle, and to bully both his prematurely ageing mother and his nephew Des Pepperdine, who harbours a dark moral secret. At times the satire shades uncomfortably into farce, but there are moments of chilling slow-motion terror, and Amis's writing is a delight. Adjectives, adverbs and descriptions are kept on a choke chain, released, like Asbo's Tabasco-fuelled pit bulls, only when they can really bite.

The Colour of Milk by Nell Leyshon (Fig Tree, hardback, out now). Like its diminutive 15-year-old narrator, this elegant sliver of a novel punches above its weight. Growing up in depressed rural England in the early 19th century, Mary is a farm girl who has acquired rudimentary literacy while employed by the local vicar. Written in urgent, childlike prose – no capital letters, minimal punctuation – this final testament explains why her lessons are about to cost her her life. Mary's voice is convincing and attractive: a feisty, lippy creature with the kind of spirit men both love and long to break, she has a native love of the slowly turning agricultural year, and an instinctive intelligence about human nature. As her tale builds to its devastating conclusion, she evokes sympathy not only for herself but for her gruesome but pitiful abuser.

SHORT STORIES **Reality, Reality by Jackie Kay** (Picador, hardback, out now). Most of the stories in this exceptional collection are told in the first person, combining Glasgow vernacular with boisterous, big-girl humour (a number are concerned with weight and diets). But at their heart is loneliness, and the bizarre, sad stratagems adopted by "the recently bereaved, the dumped, the chucked" to cope with isolation. One woman spends her "staycation" pretending to be a "Masterchef" contestant, cooking under the eye of the burglar alarm "that could just as easily be the eye of the watching world". Another, dragging out her days in an abusive old people's home, invests hope in the one apparently kind, sane carer, Vadnie. A few stories later, we visit Vadnie away from work, musing over headstones in Willesden Lane cemetery, grieving for an imaginary husband. Which is more painful, Jackie Kay asks, fantasy or reality?

MEMOIR **The Man Within My Head by Pico Iyer** (Bloomsbury, hardback, out now). Graham Greene once started a memoir called "110 Airports". Pico Iyer, an Indian brought up in England and California and now living in Japan, has spent much of his life in airports. Aged eight when his family moved to Santa Barbara, he chose to "commute" back to school in Oxford – "I have always loved being alone." As restless as Greene, with whom he has intricately identified since he was a teenager, he now roves the world as a travel writer. This unusual memoir is a "counterbiography", a homage to two fathers – his charismatic natural father and the father he adopted mentally, and whose books he reads as though they were his own "private diary". It is not only compellingly readable, but as telling about Greene as any biography yet published.

HISTORY **Just Send Me Word by Orlando Figes** (Allen Lane, hardback, out now). Drawing on the largest known cache of Gulag letters, Figes tells the story of two Muscovite scientists, Sveta and Lev, who, having met as students in 1935, kept their love for one another alive over a separation of 14 years. Their dogged devotion in the face of suffering both physical and mental – Lev describes temperatures falling to -47°C in the Arctic winter, Sveta battles with depression – is extraordinary. But equally remarkable is the courage of Lev's Gulag companions in helping to smuggle his letters out of the camp, and, more than once, to smuggle Sveta in. Around his central story, Figes weaves a vivid picture of Russia under Stalin, and in a moving final chapter he meets Lev and Sveta, grandparents in their 90s, shortly before their deaths. ■

THE VISUAL CV

Peter Capaldi

The actor best known as a demented spin doctor is heading for "The Hour". **Matthew Sweet** picks his best work

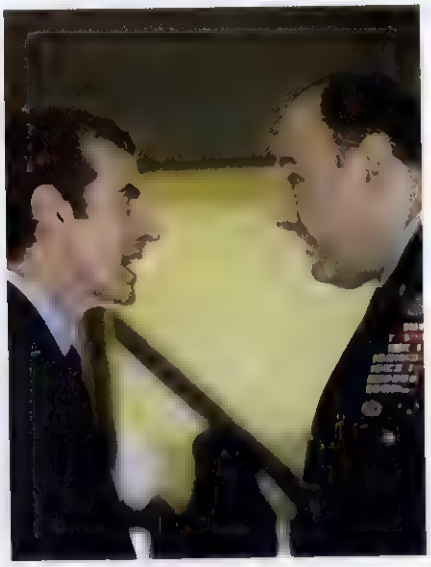
1983 Danny Oldsen in **Local Hero**
The world's first sight of Peter Capaldi: the primped, polyglot creature of Knox Industries, an American oil firm hoping to annex a fogbound stretch of Scotland. He's not nearly as rapacious as his position demands. He can't even bring himself to euthanase the rabbit he stuns with the wheels of his company car. (The morning after the accident, he's feeding her grass and calling her Trudy.) Hugh Grant might easily have played a part like this. Capaldi's comic discomfort, though, isn't suffused with a sense of his own cuteness. He really could be as awkward as he looks.

1988 Angus Flint in **The Lair of the White Worm**
These days Capaldi wears the fangs – in the 1980s his flesh was sufficiently tender to receive them. Ken Russell's picture, a 1970s Hammer horror fallen through a wormhole to the Thatcher years, requires Capaldi to submit to the jaws of Amanda Donohoe: blue, naked, scaly and Nijinskying around the moorland manor to which his kilted archaeologist has come to torment her sensitive reptile ears with the sound of the bagpipes. There Angus lies, bloodied on the flagstones, as she slithers towards him. Her head sinks below his blue tartan hem-line. His face becomes a bespectacled crease of pain. Not quite a killer blow, but close.

1993 Gavin Bellini in **Soft Top Hard Shoulder**
He's not just a long face; Peter Capaldi also writes and directs. His short "Franz Kafka's It's a Wonderful Life" won an Oscar in 1995. Here, for reasons of parsimony as well as pride, he stars in his own screenplay as a deracinated Scot chugging north from London to Glasgow in a knackered Triumph Herald. His uncertainties are as profuse as his hair. Capaldi's cinematic roots are on proud display – a gag about a bunny on the road is a kiss blown to "Local Hero" – but he seems more ambivalent about cultural baggage: when Gavin returns to his folks in Glasgow, he comes to spurn his inheritance, not to claim it.

2005 Malcolm Tucker in **The Thick of It**
Armando Iannucci's savage twist on "Yes Minister" needed a spin doctor who was irresistibly vile. Capaldi delivered the greatest monster of our age: a carnivorous seahorse, bobbing around the open-plan rockpools of Millbank, randy for human meat. Like all great screen psychopaths, the Cabinet Enforcer likes to explain himself. "In a quest to make you understand the level of my unhappiness," he warns, "I'm likely to use an awful lot of what we would call violent sexual imagery." But it's the ladylike touches that are the real instruments of terror: the way his eyes half-close and flutter; those little coquettish flurries that precede each bloody feast on human dignity.

2008 King Charles I in The Devil's Whore
Unlike some of his peers, Capaldi hasn't made a career of costume parts – unless you count his transvestite turns in "Prime Suspect 3" and "Mr Wakefield's Crusade". But gaze upon his doomed monarch in Peter Flannery's interregnum drama, and you'll see him perform the preternatural trick of clearing his eyes of everything but damaged Stuart imperiousness. The bloke with the specs from "Local Hero" wears a Van Dyck moustache as if it were his divine right. It's like watching a 1980s apartment block being stripped back to reveal the underlying 17th-century architecture.



2009 Malcolm Tucker in In The Loop
In his art-school years, Capaldi was a member of a punk band that performed under the name of The Bastards from Hell. Though Tucker is employed to defend the fragile escarpments of the status quo, there's something of the moshpit about his enthusiasm for spitting, tendon-straining aggro. The cinema version of "The Thick of It" transplants him to America, where his monstrosity seems all the more profound. The TV series, perhaps, would not have asked Capaldi to threaten his latest ministerial victim with an invitation to an "assisted suicide".

2011 Professor Marcus in The Ladykillers
Capaldi knows his British film history, but in the stage version of Ealing's murderous comedy he declined to reproduce the mildewed gentility of Alec Guinness. This Professor Marcus, plotting with his gang in the attic of a genteel Victorian survivor, was a twitchy daddy-long-legs defeated by the physical complexities of crime – like carrying a cello case full of cash. Capaldi drew, though, on the same Nosferatu appetites of the original – as if he might, at any moment, dart for the neck of Mrs Wilberforce and sink his incisors into her lavender-scented neck.

2011 Samuel Kent in The Suspicions of Mr Whicher
Capaldi is a locus of both suspicion and grief in this ITV adaptation of Kate Summerscale's bestselling tale of a brutal child-murder in 1860s Wiltshire. He gives a masterclass in resistance to those scenery-chewing impulses that overwhelm actors when mutton-chops are gummed to their cheeks. This summer he joins the cast of "The Hour", the BBC's rewrite of its own early history as a prime-time serial thriller. But why, you might ask, is an Oscar-winning director who has led two Hollywood-friendly features still supplying support in TV drama? Let's not inquire too deeply. We are the beneficiaries of his reluctance to conquer the world.

The Hour this summer, The Thick of It this autumn, both BBC2

BBC, ITV/ALL STAR; IDS/THE GUARDIAN; RONA DUNCAN; REX; GILES KEYTE/COMPANY PICTURES; ITV/REX

PLACES

In McClennanville, South Carolina, Maria Baldwin plants heritage seeds from Anson Mills, and sells her home-grown vegetables to Sean Brock's restaurants.

A taste of history

The food in the Deep South of America is getting back to its agrarian roots, with a twist. Jon Fasman meets the people behind the grains and grits – and goes for an Indian in Mississippi

IN A NONDESCRIPT warehouse tucked behind a defunct car wash on the outskirts of Columbia, South Carolina, Glenn Roberts holds the American South in his hands. Roberts is a former hotel and restaurant designer who now runs Anson Mills, which distributes and mills heirloom seeds and grains. He has a shock of silver hair, blue eyes and a jovial and expansive manner. His speaking style could be called "discursive" in the same way the ocean can be called "a bit damp".

Laid out on his cluttered desk are several sealed plastic bags that he picks up and displays, one by one: rice, milled rice, sesame seeds, and the bedrock grain of the American South, the finely milled corn known as grits. Rice, sesame seeds and grits, of course, are available at any American grocery store. But Roberts's grains are not grocery-store products. They are more irregular, some smaller and some larger. And they certainly do not taste like grocery-store fare. The sesame seeds have a nutty, grassy scent; they smell like ordinary sesame seeds much as a freshly cut summer lemon smells like washing-up liquid, while his grits have an earthy sweetness, an essence-of-corn flavour.

These are some of the earliest crops grown in the South – not pale imitations of those crops but the actual seeds. And in those bags, in his hands, are a snapshot of the land, its history and what its people ate: a botanical daguerreotype of a vanished world. The sesame seeds are genetically close to what west Africans, seized and forcibly taken to America to toil in the plantations, brought with them on their passage. Africa also provided okra, as well as other foodways – look closely at Jollof rice from Nigeria and jambalaya, from Louisiana, and you'll barely be able to tell the difference.

In South Carolina, sesame seeds are still called by their Bantu name (*benne*). Rice reportedly came to America when a British ship sailing from Madagascar ran aground near Charleston in the late 17th century. As payment for fixing his ship the captain gave some seed rice to a local farmer. It was an opportune gift. Growing rice was labour-intensive and costly. It required a large amount of land and people to cul-

PHOTOGRAPHS **KAEL ALFORD**

>tivate it, but fetched a good price when sold. It was, in short, the perfect crop for a slave-based economy: planters paid nothing in labour costs and reaped the marketplace benefits. The origins of corn date back much further than either of the other two crops. Native Americans were growing corn a thousand years before Christ handed out the loaves and fishes.

Africa, Europe, Native America. That they combined to form the mainstays of southern cuisine is hardly surprising; they combined to form America.

For centuries southerners ate grits not because they were southern, but because they were there. Southern food was close to the land; it was an agricultural region, and largely a poor one. The reason Cajuns eat gumbo over rice and not with a baguette, despite their Francophone origins, is because rice, not wheat, came from southern Louisiana. Greens (collards, usually, or some other hardy dark green) cooked with smoked pork became a staple of the African-American table – because the habit of eating long-cooked greens came from Africa, because collards grow almost anywhere and require little tending (perfect for a people whose working day never ended and the pay-cheque never arrived) and because slaves tended to get the less appealing bits of meat after butchery, and stewing was a way to stretch them.

Today the South is far less agricultural than it was. Today there are grocery stores everywhere. Today grits – indeed, southern food – is not southern so much as it is "Southern". In Atlanta, where I live, the two most renowned southern places – Mary Mac's and the Colonnade – are often considered a bit naff; locals feel about them more or less the same way a Londoner would about touring Buckingham Palace, or a Parisian about going up the Eiffel Tower. And in a sense, those landmarks on the plate are not all that different from those iconic buildings. Britain is a monarchy in name only. Fin-de-siècle Paris is more than a siècle past. The contemporary South is profoundly different from the region it was a century ago, yet – like Paris and London – it retains an essential core: something to do with manners, rootedness, civility. And, of course, food.

For centuries southerners ate grits not because they were southern, but because they were there

WHERE THE SOUTH begins and ends is an open question. Richmond, Virginia, was the capital of the Confederacy; today, though, it is barely beyond the orbit of the Washington suburbs. Texas was part of the Confederacy, but Texas is Texas. Northern Florida certainly is the rural South; southern Florida is basically Havana, Port-au-Prince and the Bronx mashed together (and I mean that as the highest of compliments).

And for all the stereotypes – Spanish moss, antebellum mansions, hazy fields – the South is hardly heterogeneous. Among my favourite aspects of travelling in the South is the way that geography has ensured that each state can contain multitudes. Knoxville, in eastern Tennessee, is part of Appalachia: rugged, mountainous and hard, its population mostly white, of Scottish-Irish heritage. Memphis, in south-western Tennessee, is often considered the northernmost part of the Mississippi Delta, home of America's first music, the blues. The two cities share nothing but the two-letter postal code TN. You could say the same about Bristol, in Virginia's Appalachian, south-western corner, and upmarket Fairfax, a northern Virginia suburb of Washington; or about swampy, low-lying, seafaring eastern North Carolina and its majestically beautiful hardscrabble western twin.

However it looks, it's booming. In recent decades no region in America has grown as quickly, in population or wealth, as the South. In the middle of the last century, Atlanta was a modest little railroad city that happened to be the capital of an agricultural state; today it is a thriving, sprawling, multicultural city that is home to dozens of Fortune 1000 companies.

The 2010 census found that the South's minority populations in particular were growing quickly. Older black Americans born here are returning; others are moving for the first time. Cascade Heights, a neigh-

bourhood in south-western Atlanta, is among the wealthiest areas in the city; it is predominantly black. Most black members of Congress hail from the South, and Mississippi, of all places, now claims to have more black elected officials than any other state.

It's not just black Americans. Buford Highway – once a poky little secondary road heading north-east out of Atlanta, now culinary home to Atlanta's booming immigrant population – is lined with Central American and Mexican restaurants, the latter often distinguished by state. In them you can find later avatars of those same foundation seeds, used in different ways: corn in tamales rather than grits, rice spiked with lard and chillies or ground and soaked into horchata, sesame seeds ground into mole sauce. Today southerners consider such food Mexican; in another few decades, that may seem as pernickety as considering frankfurters German.

Glenn Roberts got out of hotel design 14 years ago, and started Anson Mills, devoted to producing and selling grains that predate mass production. Much of what he sells are landrace crops, meaning they developed naturally, rather than being selectively bred. Anson Mills has contracts with – and usually provides seed to – southern farmers who grow acres of landrace crops, at yields far lower but with demands far higher than their more common counterparts.

He insists that landrace crops like these are essential for food security. Genetic diversity among flora is a good thing, and landrace varietals vary wildly not just from continent to continent but often from field to field. Roberts's clients, who include many of America's most prominent chefs, like his products for another reason: they taste good. And that is what got Roberts into the business.

"My mother was Geechee," he explains (a Geechee is someone from south-eastern coastal South Carolina, often called the Lowcountry). "She grew up in Edisto, South Carolina, and she couldn't find rice that tasted the way it used to."

That is not an uncommon complaint from someone looking back at childhood from a distance. Mrs Roberts, however, happened to be right, and she happened to be from a particular hotbed of American deliciousness. Many things from the Lowcountry taste better than similar products from elsewhere.

Much like Cajun and Creole cuisine of southern Louisiana, which is geographically similar, Lowcountry cuisine shares much with the rest of the South, but is distinct: more vibrantly seasoned, with an emphasis on seafood. The shrimp that feast on the eelgrass and brackish Lowcountry water are the sweetest I have ever tasted. The area is also renowned for its crabs and oysters, but at the risk of causing a stir, those are better farther north – the blue crabs in the mid-Atlantic, as close to the Chesapeake Bay as possible, and the oysters from New England or eastern Canada.

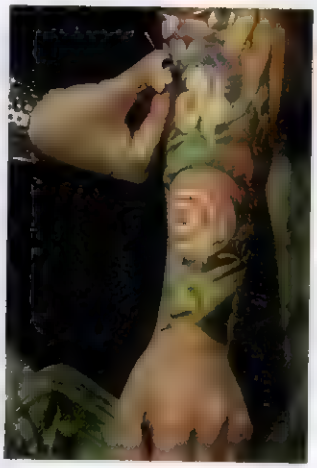
Deep southern soul
ABOVE & TOP Martha Lou in her soul-food kitchen in Charleston, which is Sean Brock's favourite restaurant

Then there is the rice. Roberts came around to his mother's view when he was putting together an historical dinner in Savannah, Georgia, often considered the Lowcountry's southern boundary. On the menu was red rice, a Lowcountry dish in which rice is fried in bacon fat with onions, garlic and celery, then cooked in a heavily seasoned tomato broth. Properly made, it is smoky, sweet and spicy; expertly made, it will have a savoury crust on the bottom of the pan.

But without first-rate rice, the dish is forgettable, and Roberts could not find first-rate rice. Alas, that is not unusual, even in the Lowcountry, which was founded, settled and made rich on rice – specifically, on Carolina Gold Rice brought over on that ailing ship from Madagascar, planted in the late 17th century, exported worldwide in the 18th and 19th centuries and now largely extinct as a commercial crop. Roberts >

> says he was in despair: red rice without good rice was not worthy of inclusion. But then he heard that someone was growing Carolina Gold Rice across the river. "I went to look," he says, his eyes wide at the memory, "and I saw the halo. The seeds are golden, and it made this golden rainbow over the field."

Indeed, Carolina Gold is beautiful in the field, and exceptional on the palate. It has a full, subtle flavour, clean and pure with almost herbal undertones. As a modern commercial crop, however, it has two major problems: it is exceptionally perishable, and the grains break easily (Carolinians made a virtue of the latter problem, turning the broken grains, called "middlins", into rice grits). For the diner, the advantages in taste far outweigh issues of storage and tensile strength; for the industrial farmer or agribusiness, making something a little worse (or in the case of most long-grain American rice, a lot worse) and much hardier wins every time.



A near-fanatical devotion to southern soil
TOP Sean Brock, chef and champion of local produce, in his herb garden. ABOVE He wears his home-grown passions inside his sleeve. LEFT His restaurant in Charleston

ONE OF ROBERTS'S biggest fans is Sean Brock, whose two celebrated restaurants, McCrady's and Husk, are in Charleston, a couple of hours south-east and a world away from Columbia. Columbia is quiet and unremarkable; Charleston is something else entirely. In any list of America's most charming cities, Charleston must surely rank near the top. Palm trees line its cobblestone streets. Its housing stock is old and stately, and as a multicultural, wealthy port city it feels more like free-spirited New Orleans than anywhere else in strait-laced, agrarian South Carolina.

The food served at McCrady's seems spiritually more like the high-end, farm-to-table restaurants of San Francisco or New York than what you'd get at a standard "meat-and-three" (the typical southern lunch or dinner plate, consisting of one portion of meat and three vegetables). The entrance, tucked down an alley, feels like a secret. Inside, the decor is high-end neutral: lots of earth tones, heavy cutlery, expensive tablecloths and linens. A recent four-course meal there began with an intense, earthy salad of winter brassica: lightly steamed broccoli, thinly sliced raw cauliflower and cabbage, dressed with buttermilk blended with Meyer lemons and garlic. For the fish course, the chef poached tilefish in olive oil, and served it with a little knot of perfectly cooked spinach, along with artful sauce-stripes of Kaffir limes, Meyer lemons and black garlic – garlic that is left to dry and ferment for 40 days. The meat course was the standout winner: three cuts of lamb cooked in different ways, including a cube of braised, compressed shoulder and neck, served with a homemade sambal that had been aged for two years. Dessert, after that dazzling, varied assault, was austere, perfect: a dish of lemon-verbena sorbet with slices of sweet apple and thin rounds of kumquat.

But consider: much of the produce and herbs came from Brock's own gardens. The tilefish was caught just off the coast, in or very near South Carolina waters, and the "Certified Natural Grown" lamb came from Border Springs, a 60-acre farm in deep south-eastern Virginia. Most of the farmers who supply the restaurant, according to the list proudly displayed on the menu, come from South Carolina. Brock has a near-fanatical devotion to southern soil. At his other restaurant, he refuses to use any non-southern ingredients: olive oil did not make it into the kitchen until he found a Texan source (whether Texas is in fact part of the South is an ongoing, unanswerable debate; for vinaigrette purposes, it seems best to err on the side of openness). Brock himself hails from rural Virginia. If McCrady's is not a southern restau-

rant serving genuine southern food, then the phrase "southern food" refers not to a living cuisine but to a museum piece.

The South needs no more museum pieces. It has history instead. Take a leisurely stroll beneath the Spanish moss in Savannah and gawk at the gabled mansions. Take Route 80 from Montgomery, Alabama, west through Alabama's Black Belt – so named for its rich, loamy soil – and you'll pass through Uniontown, Demopolis, Cuba: little towns with little downtowns of single-storey brick storefronts.

But the New South is right on top of it. Stand at the grave of Margaret Mitchell, who wrote "Gone with the Wind", and you'll see Atlanta's skyscrapers looming behind you. A few months back I was in Nashville, and after a day of perusing some country-music shrines – the Grand Ole Opry House; Bobby's Idle Hour, one of the world's greatest dive bars – I had a wonderful dinner at Dunya Kabob, one of Nashville's many Kurdish restaurants. A year back I found myself in Oxford, Mississippi, surely one of Charleston's most fearsome rivals for the title of the South's most charming town. I was on my way to Parchman Farm, Mississippi's state penitentiary, where prisoners still wear black-and-white jumpsuits.

It was sundown, and in an unremarkable little strip mall I discovered the best bar snack in Mississippi, if not the entire planet: thinly sliced pig's ears, fried crisp, laid on a bed of braised, tonic collard greens and tossed with a tamarind vinaigrette. That is the creation of Vishwesh Bhatt, a Gujarati who has been cooking in Oxford, Mississippi, for the last decade. The dish is both authentically southern – witness the greens and ingenious use of odd bits of the pig (southern cuisine, coming as it does from agricultural poverty, is inherently thrifty) – and authentically Indian: the tamarind and the chickpea flour with which Bhatt coats the ears. As I emerged from the restaurant, the muggy, fragrant Mississippi evening wrapping itself around me like a sweater, the taste lingered, but so did the idea behind the taste.

Is it new? Of course, just as Brock's cooking is new. But that makes it neither untraditional nor un-southern. After all, those seeds that Glenn Roberts held in his hand produce crops at once ancient and – precisely because they are so ancient, because the South is no longer a region of small farmers growing their own grains and taking them to the local mills, because even in the rice-loving Lowcountry most people eat supermarket rice and in the rest of the grits-loving South people eat supermarket grits – new to the palates of almost everyone who tries them. The past is never dead. Neither is it past. ■

When in...Venice

Do as the Venetians do. **Jane da Mosto**, scientific adviser to the Venice in Peril Fund, gives her tips

DO try to stay for as long as possible, even months or years. Apart from the obvious draws, Venice is a great base from which to set off on trips around the lagoon, to the beach (Lido, but also Punta Sabbioni and Jesolo) and to picturesque local towns like Bassano del Grappa and Vicenza.

DO visit the museums and churches, often a sanctuary from the crowded alleys. The secret tour of the Doge's Palace is essential, and some guides can organise a visit to St Mark's Basilica at night, when it's empty and dramatically lit. Special arrangements can also be made to look around the Arsenale (once the heart of Venice's naval power) and the Fondazione Cini (on the island of San Giorgio) which, through their architecture, views and particular contexts speak more than words about Venice.

DON'T walk around with your nose buried in a map or worry about getting lost. It won't be long before you find a familiar landmark, or a sign to Piazza San Marco, Rialto or Accademia. The areas of northern Cannaregio, lower Castello and Giudecca are particularly fine wandering spots.

DON'T eat anywhere with a plasticated menu showing photos of the food on offer. Or give business to the absurd drinks and snack vending machines that have recently landed around Venice. The only good one is the milk machine parked in the Garage Comunale, Piazzale Roma – it dispenses fresh, unpasteurised milk straight from the nearest dairy.

DO try some Venetian specialities when eating in or out: *castraure* (earliest artichokes, fried or stewed), mauve mantis shrimp, and *moeche* – little soft-shell crabs from the lagoon – are all delicious, as is the wild duck with artichokes at the Antica Trattoria alla Maddalena, just by the *vaporetto* stop on the outlying island of Mazzorbo.

DON'T come on a cruise ship: they are ugly, spoil the view, damage air quality and building fabric, and destroy the fragile lagoon ecosystem.

DO rent a bicycle and explore the Lido or the little-visited area of Forte Marghera. Take a picnic bought from the Rialto market or the vegetable barge on the San Barnaba canal.

DO take a gondola ride, but don't let your *gondoliere* talk on his mobile. Nor should your taxi driver go too fast across the lagoon, or too near small boats or other islands: the wake waves are damaging and dangerous.

DON'T bother with shops selling mass-produced tat (mainly Chinese). This applies to clothes and handbags as much as rip-off "Venetian souvenirs" in the form of tacky masks and glass geegaws – there is so much high-quality stuff on offer if you keep your eyes open.

DO support local artisans. San Samuele, the area between Campo San Stefano and Palazzo Grassi, is crammed with superb jewellers, antique dealers, galleries and boutiques. Buying glass direct from the outlets in Murano can be tricky, so try Giordana Naccari's Angolo del Passato, or the glass artist Massimo Micheluzzi for chandeliers and vases. Stationery is still hand-printed in the workshop of Gianni Basso (his son, a marine biologist, has just joined the firm).

DO keep to the right when moving slowly, allowing Venetians to overtake you – they're not on holiday and know where they're going.

DON'T walk side by side (*in doppia fila*): most streets are too narrow for two-lane traffic.

ILLUSTRATION **NEIL GOWER**

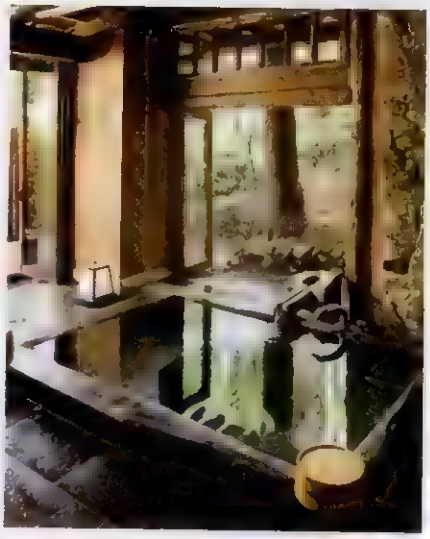
SEVEN WONDERS

Frances Ashcroft

As a professor of physiology, she has an academic interest in discovering the limits to human endeavour. As a keen traveller, she has a personal one. When researching a previous book, "Life at the Extremes", she travelled the globe, climbed mountains and dived in oceans. Frances Ashcroft is now the European Laureate of the L'Oréal-UNESCO Awards for Women in Science

BUILDING PANTHEON, ROME
It is extraordinary to think that almost 2,000 years ago the Romans engineered and built the Pantheon, which is still, I believe, the world's biggest unreinforced concrete dome. Standing in the shaft of sunlight coming in through the oculus is like being bathed in a celestial spotlight. But I love bridges, too, and my favourite is the Oresund Bridge that connects Sweden and Denmark. I've been across it many times to visit friends in Lund. It's beautiful, and I like the symbolism of the way it bridges two countries that were once at war and the romance of how, when it was finished, the Prince of Denmark and the Princess of Sweden met in the middle to celebrate.

BEACH COROMANDEL PENINSULA, NEW ZEALAND
I visited this beach and fell in love with it immediately. It doesn't have a name, and very few people go there. We stayed with a friend, who has a house in an olive grove on a hill overlooking the beach. It has blinding white sand and a sparkling blue sea. Behind the beach, there is a wild forest of tree ferns and white and blue agapanthus, and at its edge a small rocky island. It was utterly peaceful; days passed and we saw no one. It was warm and windy, and we went sea kayaking and I kept getting tumbled out.



CITY OXFORD
I'm not a city person but I love Oxford – the spires, the bells and the warm golden stone. It's at the same time tranquil and exhilarating, filled (like any university city) both with flocks of bright young people and ghosts of the past. And it's great for science: people tend to think of Cambridge as the place for science and Oxford for humanities, but Oxford has wonderful science too, and as a place to work – for me, anyway – it's unsurpassed. Every day I wonder at how I come to be here and think how lucky I am. I also get enormous pleasure from my college, Trinity, which is small, friendly and has magnificent gardens.

HOTEL A RYOKAN IN JAPAN
To be honest, I much prefer my own bed! But if I have to choose a hotel my favourite would be a Japanese *ryokan*. Staying in one is such a different experience. It starts with a Japanese bath, which is small, deep and very hot – sitting in it, you feel your cares melt away. Then an exquisite lady in a beautiful dress comes and serves you delicious sushi and morsels of vegetarian food in your room. By the time you go to bed, you are feeling perfectly relaxed. I was once taken to stay in an old Japanese home in Shirakawa-go by a Japanese colleague. It's like a Japanese version of Switzerland with Toblerone houses – triangular, brown and thatched. It was deep snow outside and there was no heating. We slept under mounds of quilts warmed by a hollow brick filled with hot coals.

WORK OF ART A POT BY LUCIE RIE

If I could have my own museum, it would be Kettle's Yard in Cambridge, which is a work of art in itself. When I was a student, you were allowed to go there and borrow a painting to hang in your room. I chose a wonderful David Jones watercolour called "Vexilla Regis"; it reminded me of that Kipling poem: "They shut the way through the woods. Seventy years ago..." If I had to choose a piece of art to live with, it would be one of Lucie Rie's marvellous pots – the thin, fine, exquisite ones. I have had a passion for pots since I was a child, perhaps because my father taught art and ceramics and made lovely pots that remind me of Lucie's. She said her pots should be used, and I had a friend who knew Lucie in her youth and had many of her magical pots, and she did just that: when I visited her we used one of them as a salad bowl.

Samantha Weinberg was talking to Frances Ashcroft. Professor Ashcroft's latest book, "The Spark of Life: Electricity in the Human Body" (Allen Lane), is published on June 28th

JOURNEY SAILING AROUND THE INNER HEBRIDES

The islands are the loveliest places on Earth when the sun shines – which, fortunately, it doesn't too often, so they're still unspoilt. Visiting them in your own boat allows you to get close to them in a way that you never could if you arrived by ferry. Each has its own distinct character: Canna has white sand, purple seaweed and turquoise sea; the Treshnish islands can only be visited when the sea is calm – they are covered in sea pinks and unafraid puffins and shags. We crashed into a rock when we arrived at Iona, but the grey stone monastery was simple and majestic; Eigg has squeaking sands and choppy anchorage; and Rum, red deer and underwater forests of kelp. The weather, even in mid-summer, is unpredictable – occasionally hot and sunny, but more usually wild, windy and with big waves, which makes for sometimes hairy sailing.

VIEW EARTH FROM SPACE

For me, this is the most wondrous view, because it has transformed the way we think of our planet. It looks so beautiful and so fragile; it makes you realise we have to take care of it. I would love to be able to see it for myself. When I was a child it was my dream to be an astronaut and I wrote to NASA, asking what A-levels to take and whether it would be a good idea to do botany, so that I could study lichens on Mars. They never wrote back, so I've had to make do with photographs. I particularly love that wonderful picture of the Earth rising over the moon, like a tiny blue ball hanging in the void.

SCALA, ALAMY PLAIN PICTURE, OXFORD PICTURE LIBRARY, ROBERT TAYLOR, GETTY

A WALK ON THE WILD SIDE

Do the Highland glide

CARTOPHILIA

Shooting the Moon

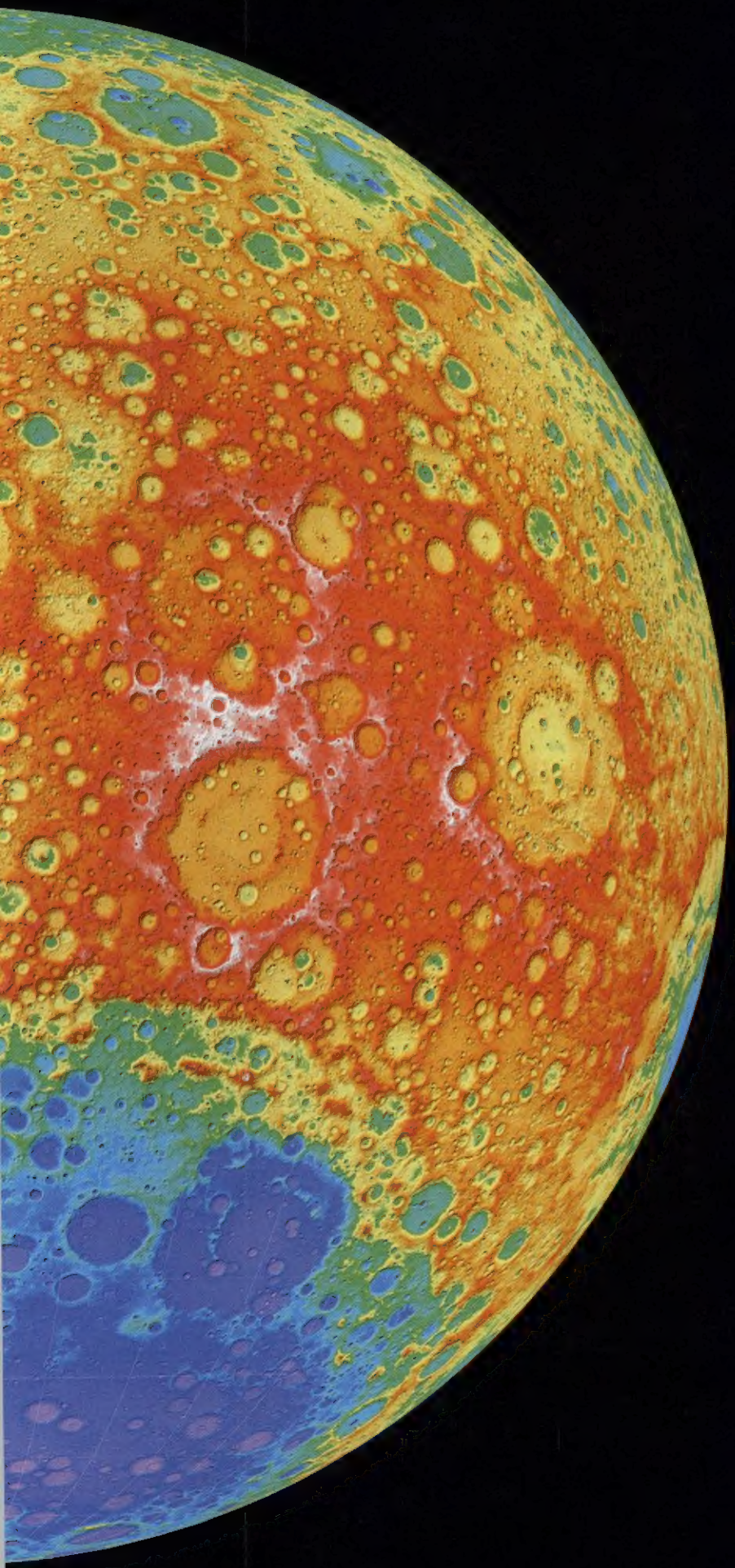
In a new series, we pore over maps – ancient, modern, lyrical or polemical. We begin with a high-tech look at lunar topography

The Moon is typically seen bathed in the white light of the sun. Like Earth viewed from above, in its full state it looks like a perfect sphere, as smooth as a snooker ball. In fact, as scientists from Arizona State University in Tempe have just revealed in a high-resolution Moon map, it has a topography that is as varied and in places extreme as anything on our planet.

In the course of its monthly elliptical orbit, the Moon moves around Earth at an average distance of roughly a quarter of a million miles. Space is a harsh environment, and the Moon has virtually no atmosphere, extremes of temperature (from -233°C at night to +123°C in the day), and no human presence – which makes mapping it tricky.

To do it, the multinational team behind this image first designed a new Wide Angled Camera (WAC) capable of withstanding the vicissitudes of outer space. They then hitched a lift for it on a spacecraft: the Lunar Reconnaissance Orbiter (LRO), which was launched by NASA in 2009 and has already gone beyond its initial mission to spend a year in close orbit of the Moon. The palm-sized WAC was mounted on the LRO, which flies at an average altitude of 50km (30 miles) above the Moon's surface. Each picture it takes covers a swathe 70km wide.

As the LRO is constantly circumnavigating the Moon, with each orbit 30km (in ground distance) from the last, the pictures it takes overlap, giving a stereo view of almost every patch of lunar ground, every month. About 69,000 of these images were sent back and fed into a computer, which used them to build an accurate model of almost all the terrain. The bits at extreme latitudes that



The images show clearly that the crater floor is very dark, which suggests that it could be formed from iron-rich basalt, typically originating as very hot lava – possibly the output from a volcanic eruption. The Orientale Basin (the blue smudge on the rim of this picture, between three and four o'clock) is one of the largest lunar landmarks. At 900km across, ringed with concentric ranges of Moon mountains, it is believed to be the result of the most recent giant impact in lunar history.

The LRO Moon map backs up the theory that the Moon started out as a giant ball of molten magma, formed about 4.5 billion years ago, the unlikely love-child of a violent encounter between Earth and a Mars-sized object. The magma cooled into the Moon's crust, before, soon after, being hit by the first of a series of large objects which left craters in their wake, forming the pockmarks you see here.

The map should shed light forwards as well as back, Robinson says. "We can now determine slopes of all major geologic terrains on the Moon...determine how the crust has deformed, better understand impact crater mechanics, investigate the nature of volcanic features, and better plan future robotic and human missions."

Man has not walked on the Moon since 1972. At the end of last year China announced its aim to send a manned mission some time in the next decade and a half. If it comes to fruition, the astronauts will now, thanks to NASA and some scientists in Arizona, have a good map to guide them around the place. – SAMANTHA WEINBERG

For more information: lroc.sese.asu.edu

Man enough

Will Smith joins a DIY course designed for women

ONE OF THE trickiest skills of modern life is putting a transparent screen-protector on an iPhone. I've got through an entire pack of four and still not been happy. An air bubble, a skew-whiff angle, a fingerprint, a covered-up speaker, all have incurred my wrath – and dented my marriage, as my wife tries to help but just gets in my light. So it is with some trepidation that I approach a DIY course featuring wallpapering. This is going to be one big iPhone cover.

On top of that I'll be, apart from the instructor, the only man present. As the name suggests, Chix & Mortar is a course run solely for women. The reverse would seem odd: a men-only DIY course would be as unnecessary as a "NO OAPS" sign at a One Direction concert. But despite the stereotype that chaps have an innate affinity with tools, where women would rather try on hats, no one in the function room of the Thistleworth tennis club in west London seems to be there for the sexual politics. Instead, when I ask why they've come, the main reason is rather practical: why pay someone to do something you can learn for yourself?

That none of the ten attendees seems tool-phobic or prone to catty remarks about each other's overalls is only testament to my ludicrous preconceptions about an all-female DIY class. But from what Paul, the Chix & Mortar tutor, tells me, my preconceptions about men and DIY classes are sadly true. Apparently the Valentine's Day couples' courses that he runs consistently result in rows: the men take charge and overrule their partners. So I decide to hang back and adopt my prison-survival strategy. I become the Grey Man, drawing no attention to myself, determined to bite my tongue even if a hammer is dropped on my foot.

Our first task seems simple enough: putting up lining paper, which in real life would cover any cracks or imperfections in a wall. Wooden boards are set up for us to practise on, and we start applying wallpaper paste to the paper using rollers on trestle tables. The last time I did anything similar was 33 years ago, making collages in primary-school art lessons – but this time there's no smell of wee, and I don't have a crush on the teacher.

Next we're told to do something quite counter-intuitive: fold both pasted ends into the middle, fold in half again and set the wet sheet aside for five minutes while we prepare the next one. I daren't ask why, in case it seems like some chest-beating challenge for the position of silverback, but thankfully one of my fellow pupils follows what is after all a legitimate line of enquiry. Apparently this is the standard way of letting long sheets rest while the paste soaks in. The sheets will unfold. It is not, as someone else posits, like sticking Sellotape to itself – an image that sets me off on a bout of iPhone-cover panic.

Apparently the Valentine's Day couples' courses result in rows

Once my first sheet is ready to be hung, I smooth it horizontally on to the board, unfolding as I go, and pushing out baneful air bubbles to the edges using a brush. The main challenge is the presence of a light switch. I'd imagined all manner of complicated measurements would be required, maybe even a special cutter, but the technique is deliciously simple. Cover it with the lining paper. Cut from each corner to the centre, lift up the flaps, push them back over the switch, then slice off the excess. Easy. It's like finding out carpets are fitted using perforated lines.

I stand back and beam at my handiwork. A smooth sheet of lining paper nestles snugly against the frame that simulates the edges of walls. As I move round the light changes, and horror strikes me, followed by a rising fury. It's not smooth at all. It looks as though I've just stuck up a roll of bubble wrap. Paul hovers at my shoulder, and I get ready to be told that I have let down the Team of Man. He surprises me by pronouncing satisfaction. The bubbles are just the paste showing, and will disappear as it dries. I allow myself a surreptitious air-punch.

I then paste and hang a sheet of willow-ish patterned wallpaper. The pattern has to be lined up so that bisected leaves and branches become whole – like chopping down a tree in reverse. This is no challenge for a man so anal he's happy to put other people's spice racks in alphabetical order. The result is convincingly arboreal; my confidence surges. If you've got an iPhone that needs covering, you know who to call. Particularly if it has a light switch in the middle. ■

PHOTOGRAPH **RICHARD LEA HAIR**

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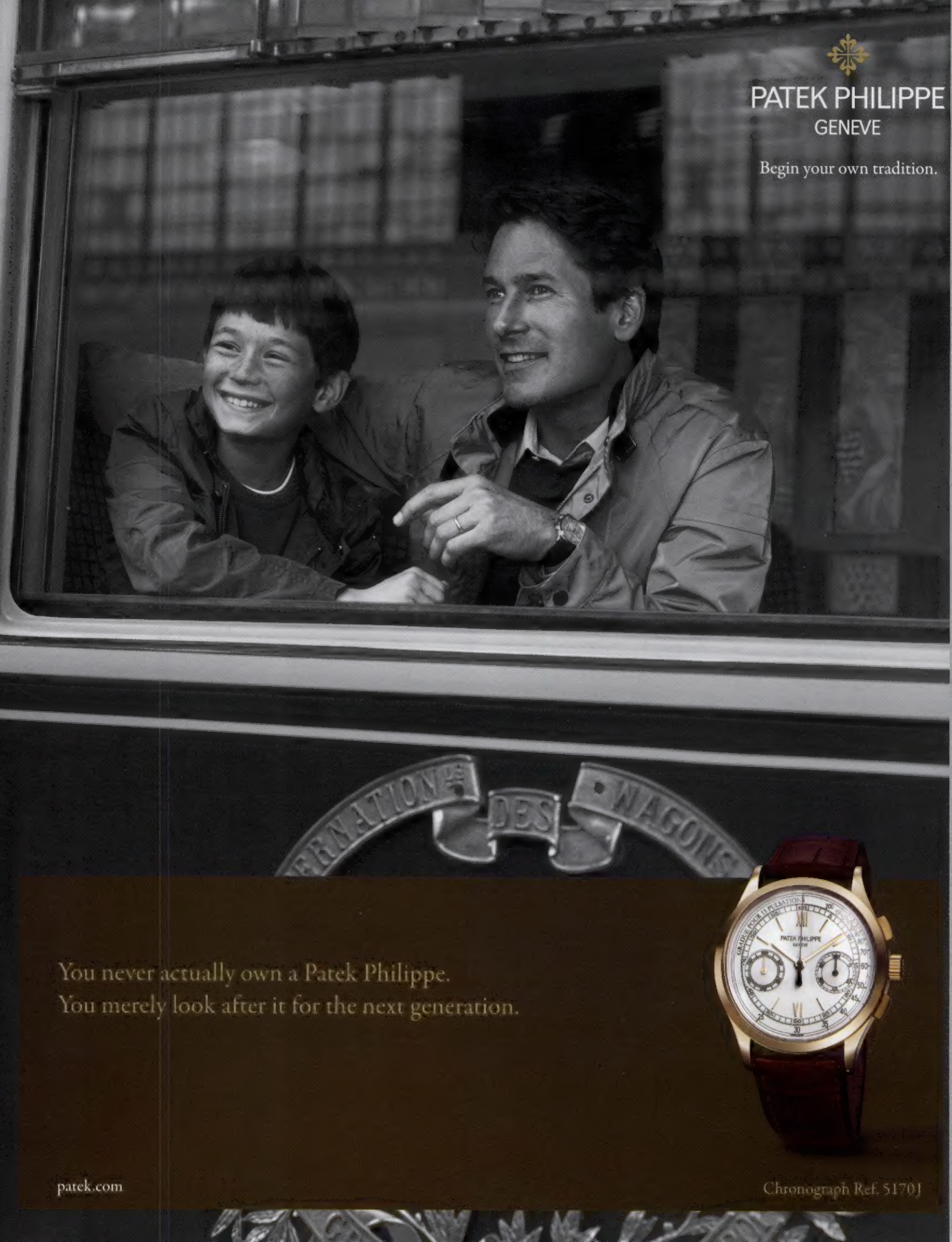
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